



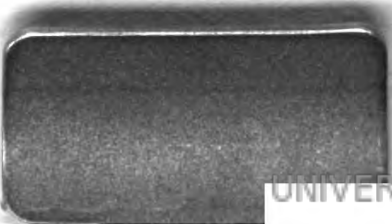
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RAMBLES AND REFLECTIONS

BY A. C. BENSON

LONDON
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FOREWORD

Not long before his death, my brother sent to his old friend, Mr. John Murray, a considerable number of Essays, asking him to get a selection made from them for publication in one volume. This book consists of the selection thus made.

These Essays were chiefly written during the last two years of his life, when, after his complete recovery from the cloud of depression which had shadowed him, he was busier and took more pleasure in life than ever before. The Essay was a favourite form of literary expression with him, and he handled it, as the ensuing pages show, with extreme felicity. Here and there, perhaps, a careful reader will detect passages that might call for the revision which they would no doubt have received from him, but it was thought better to print them just as they stand.

E. F. BENSON.

LAMB HOUSE,
RYE.

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RAMBLES AND REFLECTIONS

I

THE DOWNS

I took a walk on the Downs to-day, the Down that is south-east of Lewes, the summit of which is Firle Beacon, and, I think, one of the finest of the South Downs. It is an isolated plateau cut off from the other downs by the Ouse on the west and the Cuckmere River on the east. There is perhaps more to admire in the huge bastion of Ditchling Down, but from there you can only spy the sea in glints and glimpses, while from Firle Down the sea is spread out below you, from the white cliff-fronts of the Seven Sisters to the mast-fringed, smoke-drifting port of Newhaven. We went up from Alfriston, that comfortable little town of red and grey brick, with its solid flint-built church and the inn pleasantly adorned by mediæval dragons green and red. One is soon on the short and springy flint-strewn turf, with its high dew-ponds, and its barrows. That is part of the charm of a down, that it seems so old a place, so unaltered by the centuries. As we walked, the widespread ocean rose with us. The sky was full of clouds, so that the sea was blue in places,

darkling in others, and in others strewn with soft golden flashes of light. The smoky steamers passed to and fro, like beetles crawling on marble, and far away there were shadowy ships of war. To the north was the fertile Weald of Sussex, climbing slowly to the heights of Heathfield and Crowborough, the whole rich in hamlets and woodlands. The colouring to-day was like a De Wint. After the long drought the fields were ochre-yellow, and the trees had a tinge of indigo.

I don't quite know what is the intense quality of pleasure that walking high up above the world gives one. It is like nothing else that I know. I think it is partly the pleasure which the Psalmist gave utterance to when he said "Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe." The world mapped out at one's feet seems a place which one could deal with, and throw one's shoe across. Down below, one is overshadowed by houses and garden walls, one walks in dusty roads with high hedges; the trees steal away heaven from one. But here one is above the tree-tops and the church-towers and the chimney-pots. One has a mastery over them. One surveys the earth and pronounces it to be very good. One sees the relation of things. The train which puffs along the line below is not the noisy, frightening thing full of busy and violent persons which it becomes at a station; it is an insect making its way through the plain, which one could divert with a poke of one's walking-stick if one had the mind. I do not wonder that the old folk went to the hill-tops to worship God, because on the top of a down one feels what it must be like to be

God, with the world at one's feet. Here one could send a rainstorm, there a swift thunderbolt, or loose the winds upon the stagnant plain.

And then too, what is more delicious than to look down the steep rampart of grass with the chalk road winding up, all cut into soft curves and bluffs, with the blue, evenly laid shadows lying in the dimples? Down in the dingles are charming patches of old forest, ancient ashes, wind-combed beeches, gnarled thorns and elders, or obsolete quarry-pits trailed over with briars and old-man's-beard. Then too, all round the base of the down, where the springs break out, there lie the ancient hamlets, with their lichened roofs and trim gardens tucked in among the elms. The whole thing gives one a sense of the field-life of the world, that life which streams so peacefully away year by year, so independent of wars and politics; the village sending out morning by morning its shepherds and ploughmen to the pleasant familiar tasks, the things that have got to be done whatever else happens, ploughing, harrowing, reaping, sowing, gathering the crop, pasturing the sheep, driving in the cows, milking, churning—the things which we ought all to take a hand in, and which could be grateful and beautiful enough if they were but gladly and serenely done. That is where the sweetness of life lies, in the breath of the morning over dewy fields, the smell of the wood after rain, the westering sun across the pastures, the gathering twilight in the village street. Coming as I do from a long line of yeomen, the love of all these things lies deep in my blood, though I have unlearned the use of

them. But as I leave the down and gain the hamlet, the real life of the place does not seem to me to be in the great grey house with its pillared façade in the green glades of the park, but in the cottage garden, the barn with its piles of grain and country lumber, the orchard close, the rich-smelling byre, the cart-shed with its bright mud-stained waggons, the cow-house full of scented breath and low-grumbling kine, the poultry-yard and the tiled dovecot. How wholesome and homely it all is, how near and dear to the heart !

All this is something much more than a sentiment ; it is not that I with my correspondence, my busy pen, my pile of manuscript, my teaching and lecturing, just find a kind of idle refreshment in it all. It is the sense of coming home, and being a part of it all. I believe indeed that each one of us lives many lives on earth ; and many of those lives have been lives of field-labour ; so that I think that the soul is haunted by the memory of its old passages and its familiar ways ; because one has no mere spectacular sense of it, one seems to live in it and to be one with it, almost as though one were revisiting a place which one had known in childhood.

I think that a man must have one settled place where his life is bound up closely with the life of others—he must have his circle and his work, where he has to make the best of uncongenial people, where things will not go as he would wish, where he has to accommodate his desires to the desires of other people, and accept their conventions even if he does not believe in them. But apart from that we may go about practising a

kind of brotherliness—with no enmity or suspicion of strange folk, but meeting them all as fellow-wayfarers and fellow-heirs of life and love. I like on days like this to enter into friendly talk with shepherds and labourers, to talk to village children ; to become a part of it all, if only for a minute, and to take delight in finding humanity much the same all the world over. And so my down-walk becomes to me a symbol of large and true and beloved things, of near concern with life, of love of earth and of all that dwells upon it or grows out of it ; a love too of sun and winds and waters, of wood and hill. We must not cut ourselves off from these things, and fix our mind too much on ideas and fancies of the spirit. They are beyond and above us doubtless ! but it is through the body, through sight and hearing, touch and scent, that we take our place in nature. And thus there rises in the heart a sort of passionate fellowship with all the dear familiar sweet movement of life, till one can hardly bear to see the twilight falling in the folded hills, were it not for the lights that wake and sparkle in the cottage windows, when men draw homewards, to see in voice and glance and touch of those whom they love a dearer and nearer fellowship still.

II

CORNWALL

THERE is surely a dimly apprehended but still quite unmistakable mystery about Cornwall. I lived there as a boy for six years and I was conscious of it then at times, though I could not have put it into words. A boy, of course, does not know how much of the mystery which involves every unfamiliar place he visits is contributed by his own inexperience, and how much belongs to the place itself. Cornwall certainly, in those early days, appeared to me curiously different from all the places I had known, and familiarity with it made it appear more, rather than less, strange. But now that I am some fifty years older, and have visited almost every part of England, I have become much more definitely conscious of an atmosphere of mystery about Cornwall, and of its entire distinctness from all other parts of England. I do not know what it is, this mysterious sense. It does not reside in the Cornish folk directly, though there is a strong touch of some foreign quality about them, and I do not think they are consciously aware of this secret strangeness, which one experiences a dozen times a day as one traverses the country. They are a quick-thinking, clever, emotional folk, with

fitful moods and fancies, but genial and forthcoming, and apt to give a stranger an unusually hospitable welcome. Neither does it reside in the landscape, which in many parts of Cornwall is distressingly bare and bleak and featureless. Nor is it in the splendid coast with its precipitous cliffs, brightly tinted rocks, long wastes of green-tufted sand-hills, fishing villages clambering up into clefts of moorland, that the secret lies. It seems rather to retire inland, away from the main roads, where the tufty stone-piled hedges, fringed with hazels, wander with many turns and dips into the lonelier valleys, or into the wide heathery uplands, crossed by innumerable ancient tracks.

This sense of strangeness, whatever it is, certainly clings about the constant evidences of very ancient habitation, the great earthworks visible in so many places, mounds or grassy circles of forts, old trenches and coast-defences ; in the rude granite crosses that a dozen times in a day may be seen standing mute and shapeless by the wayside, the stones set up for worship or memorial on moors or grassy hills, and bearing names, which, as my father once said to me, always seem to symbolise "arrested mirth," such as the Dancing Maidens, or the Merry Men.

Whatever the essence of it may be, Cornwall is assuredly haunted by some mute and ancient spirit, not hostile or unkindly, not either curious or affronted, not even sad or solitary, but sitting brooding and contemplative, like a sea-beast that has crawled from the tide to sun itself upon the sand, neither surprised nor vexed by modern novelties and incursions, but ignorant and careless

of what is taking place, and not in the least concerned about the slowly vanishing past, nor caring to keep it alive.

This may seem an idle fancy ; but when I went there recently, to revive the memories of our old life there, and not in any way expecting to find anything unusual or strange, the sense of this hidden mystery came across me day after day, often with a poignant emphasis. I am not yielding to a mere trick of the imagination ; I say as seriously as I can that I am certain that there is some haunting presence in Cornwall, a definite current of some force or thought, which affects in a very strange way the current of one's own thoughts, and is not suggested by any subjective perception or emotion.

Of all the days on which I experienced this, I felt it most of all on a certain day, when I was alone, and motoring about a tract familiar to me long ago. It may perhaps be thought that the feeling originated in the obscure gestures of half-forgotten memories ; but it was not so, for in this respect the old boyish memories were quite separate and distinct. I could see, for instance, the fields in a green valley, intersected by a full-flowing stream curving among clumps of alders, where I spent a summer day with an old family servant, fishing gingerly between the boughs with a worm, and pulling out little trout at every corner from the eddies. That and a score of boyish vignettes met me at every turn. But the other sense—could I but describe it!—swept across my mind over and over again. “ There is something here,” I said to myself, “ something out of the

common, the presence and influence of which I feel."

That day I went from Truro below the fields of Kenwyn, my old home, past the sequestered house of Featherbeds in its warm wooded cleft among the uplands, and so along the sunny valley of Idless, with its brimming stream. To the right rose the great stretch of hill named Bishop's Wood, densely covered with oak copses, in the midst of which emerges a huge circular British camp, its ramparts all grass-grown.

Then there was the manor-house of Gwarnack, with the clustered farmstead, and the quaint cognisance of the bear and ragged staff over its porch. Slowly the road wound up to St. Allen, the remotest and loneliest of villages, with the stately granite tower of its church all overspread with green tufted lichens. Who or what St. Allen was, or why he crept away into what must have once been a wild forest country, who can tell? So on by winding lanes, old houses, belts of woodland,—the trees up here all warped and cramped by great winds out of the sea—to the hamlet and Church of St. Erme, with its solid upstanding blindly staring tower and fantastic rows of pinnacles; and back again by the old and once stately house of Treworgan, descending steeply among the woods to a stream, and through a farmyard—I doubt if from their stupefied smiles the dwellers there had ever seen a car pass through before! Forty years ago and more I rode that way with my father. I remember the stony, precarious descent to the farm, and my terror that I might let down the heavy plodding horse

I bestrode. But all that memory was sharp enough, and how my father told me that by an accident he discovered that the village feast-day at St. Erme was the day of St. Hermes in the Roman Calendar—these cross-tracks of old saints, both native and imported, were confusing enough !

But coming and going, all the way, the same sense of a haunting presence was upon me, not continuously but at intervals, sometimes a sense of unreality, as if my journey was a part of a tale being told, sometimes as though round the next expectant woodland corner, or in the thickets of the wayside dingle, or in the steep valley-cleft where the stream bubbled freshly down, or beneath the rude stone tower at St. Allen, or most of all by a sheltered wood-end to which I walked to catch a southward-opening view, there was waiting the subtle presence, so persistently intermingling with my thoughts. It was not as though its intentions were bent on me, or that it took any heed of whither I went. It was more like coming across the blown scent of a flower, or walking into a drift of pungent wood-smoke.

To one who reads this, the whole experience may seem fanciful and imaginative ; but I was neither excited nor sad. I was pleasantly interested in the old sunlit memories, and could cheerfully have spent the day in reconstructing them. But the new intervening sense would have none of them. It seemed to be concerned solely with feeling, and not with any of the intellectual processes of the brain.

I am by no means subject to such vague incur-

sions of thought. As a rule I am given to very precise and definite observation of colour, form, and detail, of hill and field, hamlet and house, flower and tree. I have never had the sense of which Wordsworth speaks of there being something animate and conscious in nature. If I am asked what I think the peculiar feeling was, I can only give fantastic and imaginative answers ; but the feeling itself may be fantastic, yet it is no more imaginative than the pricking of the hairs on face or hand in an electric storm, or the fragrant scent which permeates a train on the Eastern Railway when it passes through a certain part of Bethnal Green, near a factory that distils perfumed oils, or like the laden sweetness that blows across the orchards and market gardens of Histon, on a day when the strawberry pickers are at their work.

There were other places in Cornwall where I felt the same presence as strongly ; in the steep wooded valley of Luxulyan, where the huge boulders of granite peer from among the trees, or among some of the lonely tidal creeks that wander away among the hills from Falmouth harbour, or among the high elms of Veryan, or the steep crested sandhills of Perranzabuloe, with their pale miniature bluffs and ridges.

It does not fit in in the least with any material or mental law that I know or believe. I do not think that an emotional crisis has any power to stamp itself upon the material features of the scene where it was enacted. I have no faith in what seems to me a ludicrous supposition, that the victims of some cruel and dastardly deed are

condemned to even a subconscious visitation of the scene of their passion. Not even round about Dorchester, where there are endless evidences of old fights, not by the great Cambridgeshire dykes, nor the poised stones of Avebury, nor on the sites of perished cities like Ostia or Tusculum, have I had any sense of urgent spiritual presences.

And so the thing is and remains utterly inexplicable ; yet I feel that in Cornwall there is something going on, some non-material stir of spirit-energy at work, which does not come insistently and deliberately into one's thought, but into which one penetrates exactly as one might step, in grotto or mine, into some accumulated carbonic vapour.

No sense of fear or shrinking accompanies the experience ; one's incursion into it is neither designed nor resented—I can offer no explanation ; I can only recall my experience as I felt it many times in the late summer of 1923 ; and even though I recollect it and record it, I am no nearer to analysing or explaining it. Even those who could hardly so definitely attest it have confessed to me that there is a sense of mystery in Cornwall, and little to account for the quite peculiar fascination it exerts upon the mind. It must remain at that ; and no ridicule or incredulity would serve in the least degree to obliterate the strong and definite impression from my mind.

III

GODOLPHIN HOUSE

I HARDLY know what sent me in search of Godolphin House. Partly it was that when the Boarding-houses were named at Eton, I called my own "Godolphin House," because it was built in the reign of Provost Godolphin. Partly there is an exotic sort of splendour about the name. Partly too I had once seen a small picture of it, and it seemed to be at all events a curious place ; but it lies in a bare stretch of country with very indifferent roads, and indeed ultimately proved so difficult to find that we nearly abandoned the quest.

The Godolphins were an ancient Cornish family, living in the parish of Breage, west of Helston, and gained an ill name in earlier days, as being among the most determined plunderers of wrecks, and even wreckers, on that dangerous coast between Falmouth and Penzance. In the seventeenth century they rose to great prominence in the political world. Sidney Godolphin, confidential minister to Charles II, was an able obsequious man. The King said of him, that he was never in the way and never out of the way. Later, he was Lord Treasurer to Queen Anne, a close friend of the great Duke of Marlborough, and was created Earl Godolphin ; but though he was the

head of the Government for eight years, he left a very feeble impression on the politics of the time. His wife was the celebrated Margaret Blagge, who formed an "inviolable friendship" with John Evelyn, and lived a pure and noble life of charity and devotion in a licentious age. Evelyn's solemn eulogy of her is famous. Her son Francis, the second Earl, was brought up under Evelyn's guardianship, and held a number of Court and political appointments. He married the daughter of the Duke of Marlborough, who on her father's death became Duchess in her own right. He was said to read only two books, Burnet's *History* and Colley Cibber's *Apology*, alternately, beginning them again as soon as he had finished them. The family died out in the male line after his death, and the present Duke of Leeds, whose surname is Godolphin-Osborne, represents them in the female line. Godolphin House was only recently sold by the Duke. Many of the Godolphins are buried in a sort of family chantry at Breage Church.

From Breage on that day, we went to St. Hilary, near Marazion, a beautiful spot hidden among trees; and then struck into a great bare stretch of country, Cornwall at its worst, with low meaningless hills on the horizon, treeless, bleak, unvisited. But we presently found ourselves under a pleasing little eminence, well-proportioned, heather-clad, with miniature crags, and pink with fading heather-blooms. But there was no sign of any particular house of distinction. Sad-coloured little houses huddled together in bare hamlets, and everywhere stretched the unattractive plain.

Presently we found ourselves among sparse and ragged plantations of stunted firs, many of which had fallen in some gale and lay in swampy disorder. At last we came to a gate with granite gateposts, and, walking up a little-used drive, to a further pair of posts of granite, rudely carved with whorls. A moment later we saw a circular lawn of grass with a monkey-puzzle tree, where some children were playing, with a long sombre front behind, and then rounding some shrubs, there burst upon our view one of the most surprising and impressive houses I have seen for many years.

Imagine a long low granite-built two-storied battlemented building, with a shallow wing at each end, and eleven great mullioned windows in a row upon the first floor. But on the lower floor, between the wings, ran an open colonnade, supported by great granite monolith columns—the whole a dark and sombre grey, and much overshadowed by tall trees, but so simple in design, so massive, that it had a dignity which does not belong to many larger buildings.

A charming little boy, curly-haired and bare-legged, saw us—he was playing some game with a little heap of money, shillings and pence, upon the grass. He pulled on a pair of little jack-boots, and came up to us, “ I’ll show you round if you like ! ”

We walked to the colonnade, and there in the centre of the wall was a fine ancient carved door. Through this we went and found ourselves in a corresponding colonnade facing inwards to the court, with similar great granite pillars. To left and right were spacious buildings with big

mullioned windows. On the right they seemed deserted, on the left there was evidently a big substantial farmstead, from which we heard the clatter of cups and genial talk.

But the fourth side of this extraordinary court was just the shell of a big building, the hinder side of which had been removed, and the front wall of it stood like a screen pierced with windows, the top of the wall grass-grown. Through a door in the centre of this screen our little guide led us, into a farmyard with its barns and ricks and trees beyond. He showed us fine groined subterranean chambers, supported by granite monoliths, full of farm litter ; up a staircase into a noble room, called " The King's Chamber," bare and desolate, with great plaster pendants in an elaborate ceiling, a high canopy of oak where a bed might have stood, an old open fireplace, and some panelling. The boy prattled on ; he told us of great iron candlesticks, carved chairs and chests, which had been sold out of the house ; he had no shyness, related his story with a dispassionate air, and accepted the shilling I offered him with complete indifference. Then, by a little path leading into the wood, we came upon a big square pool or stewpond, now dry, closely encircled by trees, with the old battlemented side of the house beyond, holding up its dusky chimneys over the undergrowth with a somewhat sinister air.

The house must have been built, I imagine, towards the end of the sixteenth century—though it is very hard to fix the date of these Cornish buildings of weathered granite, in a country where the Tudor traditions lasted on long after they had been

elsewhere superseded. It must in its prime have been a fine mansion, with hospitable possibilities, but not built for defence, or with any fear of attack. Whether the King's Chamber implies the actual visit of a monarch, I do not know. It seems hardly likely. It was evidently the state bedroom of the house.

But I can only say that the whole place seems to me among all the houses I have ever seen the most incredibly strange and romantic. It is not that it is of immense size ; but the way that it is hidden in this bare plain, lurking at the foot of a heathery hill, in these wild woods ; and the amazing dusky solidity of it, its singular design, the great columned porticos, and the manner in which it melts away at the back into a simple farmstead, all unite to make it a place out of the reach of architectural or poetic imagination. It seems too far remote from the world to do much in the way of ever attracting guests, and whether the country round ever afforded sport in the way of hunting or hawking I cannot say. It all seems roughly cultivated now, and ill adapted for any particular form of game. I suppose it was inevitable that a great house like this should become ruinous, for it could hardly accommodate itself to modern country-house conditions. My own impulsive mind, which always contemplates the joys of permanent residence in any very attractive and romantic spot, was instantly brought up sharply by the insistent question as to what one could possibly *do* there. It is far from a station, far from a town, approached by poor stony lanes, in a very sparsely populated country. Indeed if

Margaret Godolphin lived there—and she is buried in Breage Church—one would think that even her charitable instincts would here have been strangely atrophied !

But meanwhile one may rejoice to add this glimpse of the sombre rugged manor among its tangled woods to one's treasures of memory. It has every quality of high romance ; it is beautiful in itself, it represents the rise and fall of a great family, which in a single century climbed to the topmost pinnacle of fame, and then disappeared. Like the fragments of Ozymandias, King of kings, it stands in desolation bearing witness to the way in which nature can make beautiful the most tragic remnants of human endeavour, and to the vicissitude which baffles or preserves, at its own free will, alike the most cautious and the most heedless of human endeavours and ventures.

IV

BODIAM

WE came down upon it suddenly, this amazing fortress, with its nine stone towers and its high curtain walls, rising as if by enchantment out of a great lake of grey water once covered with lily pads—what was the secret it guarded so closely, what was the life it kept so secure? It is impossible to say. It was built by Sir Edward Dalyngruge, a hero of Cressy and Poitiers: but it lies low, nearly at the bottom of the river-valley, it does not defend any road or bridge, and as a matter of fact, warlike and menacing as it is, it has never sustained a siege, loosed an arrow, or fired a carronade against a foe, though it preaches the doctrine of frightfulness from every loophole and sneering parapet. It has changed owners many times and is now in the faithful and sympathetic hands of Lord Curzon, who has saved it from further ruin and disrepair by restoration so delicate as to be invisible, and with no diminution of its ancient awe-inspiring air.

You reach the castle along a stone causeway. Carved in the hillside you can see the trough of the old road which gave access to the place. There are gaps in the causeway, once spanned by draw-bridges, but the tower that guarded the approach

is a ruin, and as you saunter in under the huge overhanging bulk, with its blank windowless walls, you can discern the great worn shields of ancient heraldry which crown the portal, in the arch of which the oak portcullis with its metal tips still hangs.

Inside, the débris has been cleared and piled so that you can penetrate to the damp basement chambers, below the level of the moat. You can see the remains of the great hall, much of the lord's dwelling-house, the chapel with its sacristy, the stable and cattle-shed. One particular room we saw with vivid interest, a high stone-built chamber, very small, but with two immense fireplaces one on each side. In this room the carcases of deer, oxen, pigs, sheep, fowls and fish were hung up on rods—you can see the empty apertures—and a great fire of green wood lighted on each fireplace; the smoke, by a ventilating contrivance, passing upwards through the chamber and out at a chimney in one of the towers. No doubt this was kept going constantly, for in winter the castle must have depended largely on its stores of smoked food.

But what a terrible life it must have been ! The lord and his family, a priest, a troop of men-at-arms, many servants, horses, oxen, sheep, perhaps pigs, must have been pent up within the high walls. There must have been little sunlight in the dark court : while the noise, the going and coming, the stench must have been intolerable. The castle bell must have been endlessly clanging for Mass and meals. The guards must all day have passed to and fro upon the high parapets

and towers. The hall, with its high piled floor of rushes, must have been full of snarling dogs and putrid bones. I suppose the inmates got out by daylight to hunt and till and cut wood : but the long winter evenings, with nothing particular to do, must have proved a sore trial !

I had that day a youthful companion of infinite cheerfulness, energy, inquisitiveness and resource. There was not a single room or fragment of a room that he did not explore. It was he who discovered a sinister well of black water in the lowest basement of one of the towers. He scaled every wall, he detected a turret-stair which led up to the battlements. As I sate in the courtyard, there was not a loophole from which his smiling face was not suddenly protruded, and his slim figure, outlined against the sky, passed swiftly again and again along precarious parapets and past precipitous battlements. He entreated my opinion upon every archæological detail, and questioned it with ardent scepticism. He gathered wallflowers from hideous ledges, and when I implored him faintly from below to abandon one particular striding-edge, he replied decisively that he was taking great care, and could only fall into the moat. I captured him at last, and declined to let go of him till we had quitted the building : but one turret I did contrive to ascend, and saw a wonderful view of well-watered valley and pastoral countryside, with a miniature train puffing merrily to a station that from that height looked hardly larger than a bee's knee, as the Scotch say.

I thank Heaven that we no longer live in castles. There they stand, the symbols of a past which we

may well be thankful to have left behind us, when fighting was the best of pastimes, and disease made havoc of all but the hardiest, when a warrior's death was, on the whole, a natural and desirable thing. But it is strange to reflect that our present peaceful legislation with its systematic diminution of all private revenues, must soon, it would seem, cover the country with another kind of ruin—the great country-houses in which no man can afford to live. Perhaps when we are all convinced and contented socialists, our descendants will make intellectual rather than romantic pilgrimages to such houses as Blenheim and Eaton Hall, and wonder that human beings can ever have chosen to live in houses where so much human labour was required to satisfy their daily needs. As the great Duke of Northumberland said, when he was planning to retrench, and it was suggested that six still-room maids were hardly necessary for the production of domestic confectionery—"Damn it, Sir, a man must have a biscuit!" That was the protest of the outraged Duke, uttered with all the dignity of conscious simplicity.

"Damn it, a man must have a roof over his head!" perhaps Sir Robert Dalyngruge exclaimed; and so this castle, which I imagine could not cost less than a quarter of a million of our money, rose in all its splendour from the lilled lake; and when all was done, no doubt he would have said with Wordsworth,

" They dream not of a perishable home
Who thus could build."

V

THE ISLE OF OXNEY

IF you follow the so-called Military Road out of Rye, you pass for the first mile or two under a long front of enchanting little bluffs, evidently an old sea-cliff, here clad with steep empurpled copses, here breaking out into pretty miniature crag faces. To your right is a river between floodbanks, running silently and muddily, and beyond that the interminable green flat of Romney Marsh, with distant uplands miles away, and no sign of life but a few clumps and farms and distant towers.

The bluffs come suddenly to an end ; and then to the left you look far up a flat pastoral river-valley, beyond which again rises a long line of low green hills, which sink down into the flat some five miles away, and at the nearer end terminate in a boldly designed headland, at the foot of which the sea used to beat two thousand years ago.

Romney Marsh is not, as one is tempted to think, an alluvial plain deposited by rivers and streams. Something much deeper and stronger is at work there. The crust of the earth is rising by inches, under pressure of some subterranean thrust—the same thrust that in the last five hundred years

has turned Rye and Winchelsea, once busy ports, into little hill-towns three miles from the sea.

The long line of green uplands of which I have spoken is the Isle of Oxney, a genuine island, still ringed round by streams of the Rother, a laborious but inefficient river, for throughout the winter the west end of the Isle lies immersed in a great shallow lake, where you can see fleets of duck at anchor, a flood which is too much for the straitened Rother to carry away.

At this point our military road comes into close touch with the military canal. All this warlike bravado dates from the Napoleonic wars. It seemed clear to strategists that a probable landing-ground for the French was down at Dungeness, where there is deep water close to land and very little coast defence is possible: so all round the huge extent of Romney Marsh, where the higher ground tips down into the level, this prodigious defence was made—a broad canal very laboriously banked on the landward side, and oaks planted in a continuous line as a screen. The canal runs straight for a quarter of a mile at a time, then turns at an angle and onwards; everywhere the still water and the grassy embankment and the contiguous oaks, for at least fifty miles round the coast to Folkestone.

Beyond the high bluff of Oxney of which I spoke, against which the sea beat not so many years ago—for in some of the churches are mediæval permits from Archbishops for the interment of shipwrecked sailors—there is another dip of broad marshy pasture-land, where the other arm of the Rother comes down.

The Isle consists of two parishes, Wittersham to the west, with a church adorned by a very grand fifteenth-century tower, the stone weathered to a peculiar greenish hue. Close by the church is a dignified modern house of original design by Sir Edwin Lutyens, where Alfred Lyttelton lived, a man of singular and surpassing modesty and charm, whose rugged face, full of humour and kindness, could flash so irresistible a welcome upon his humblest friend. It seemed as though anything might have been possible for him with his quick intelligence, his vitality, his humour, his infinite tactfulness, and with his great reputation for athletic prowess. But he did not succeed as a Cabinet Minister, and had to face an ordeal, in a debate on Chinese labour, which must have been a terrible trial to a man of such companionable benevolence, when for the space of an hour he stood at the table unable to get a hearing for a single sentence, and was shouted down by the Opposition. As a judicial arbitrator he did good service; but he died prematurely, an instance, perhaps, of the danger of early overstrain. No man of his generation was better beloved: even I who knew him comparatively little, standing as I often do by his monument in Wittersham Church, renew a sense of personal loss, and hate the death which has swept away the friend of friends.

I hardly know what the singular charm of the Isle consists in; but it is a place that one constantly desires to revisit. I think it is partly that it is so definite an area, that the mind delights to grasp it in its entirety, with the instinctive

pleasure in what is small. There is but one other church in the Isle, the Church of Stone at the eastern end, also a dignified and ancient place. There are but two main roads in it; one that crosses the Isle on the way to Tenterden, ascending the steep south front of it by an inclined road cut deep into the hill, and one that runs from end to end of the Isle. There are a good many beautiful old homesteads, some irregular and half timbered, some of mellow brick and orange-lichened weather tiling. It is a pastoral space of earth, with a few bits of copse and woodland. It seems just as large a territory as a virtuous prince could rule perfectly, knowing all his subjects, and acquainted with every house and field.

On the road that leads from Stone to Appledore there is a big ancient inn. Here if you take a footpath along the river-edge, and thread your way among rushy pastures, you come at last to a little smooth oval hill rising perhaps a hundred feet above the level, and quite isolated in the middle of the wide valley. On the top is a clump of wind-hardened trees and a stone-walled enclosure of about half an acre. To my immense surprise, when I walked there one spring day, this turned out to be an old graveyard full of turfy mounds and a few headstones of ancient aspect, leaning at all angles. From the inscriptions, it appeared as if there had been no interments for a hundred years.

But the place had an incomparable charm. To the west there were some wide fields full of flood water, like a lake. The floor of the valley was like a map, divided up with walls of turf and

dykes, the river dawdling away to the east between its flood-banks, and beyond the oaks of the canal, the interminable rich levels of Romney Marsh. To the south the green slopes of Oxney, with scattered copses and farms, and to the north, a well-wooded more populous countryside, where a distant town, like a splash of red, lay out on the plain ; and shadowy downs beyond. There was no sound there but the whispering of the wind in the grass and the far-off bleating of sheep, while half a mile to the north-east lay a little hamlet of substantial houses, with an ancient worn-looking chapel—perhaps the Church of Ebony to which this graveyard belongs. It seemed a sweet place for almost any purpose, except to be buried in !

I learned that a little priory once stood here, but it was long ago burnt to the ground, and no trace of it is clearly visible.

I have seen, of course, far more beautiful and arresting scenes, but none more permeated with so intense and simple a quality of its own. These miles of well-watered pasture, the emerald-coloured spring-grass just beginning to show through the buff-weathered winter stalks ; the long dykes cut across the pastures, blue with the reflected sky, the Isle rising up with low graceful curves out of the flat, a harmony of softest green, and the deserted graveyard, giving the last touch of human pathos to the scene. What does it all mean ? For these scenes, where there is no confusion of effects, and where the whole seems planned just to work out to perfection a single idea, a single impression, have a symbolic touch.

They are designed, it would seem, they have a beauty-loving mind behind them ; and the fact that all is hinted and suggested rather than plainly told, gives them a sense of a personal mystery concealed, which is after all what makes them memorable.

VI

LAMB HOUSE, RYE

IN England there is nothing more beautiful than the villages and hamlets which seem to grow up out of the soil with an artless sort of grace, though the towns are too often awkward clusters and concretions, stuck clumsily together without form or forethought. But Rye is the exact opposite of this ; its perfect proportion and gradation are the result of an exquisitely compact and well-designed site, a small sandstone hill shaped somewhat like a limpet thrust boldly out from the Sussex uplands, with three precipitous fronts ; and all of this has been marvellously mapped out and used, every yard of it, for house and street and garden-ground, till it reminds one, in its centrifugal aspect, more of a honeycomb built by industrious bees, than of a human construction.

Rye has indeed many of the qualities of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, in dimensions, in proportions, in its ever-open gates, its walls and towers—even, when seen from afar beneath a broad-flung blaze of noon or a solemn light of sunset, in a certain jewelled glow of colour, of jasper or rose-jacinth, with an emerald interchange in its bosky and leafy garden-closes.

Rye too has the merit of being self-created by

men of equal rights. It has never been feudally overawed or tyrannically administered. It is a town of burgesses, with a quiet and unpretentious dignity of their own. In the gently winding concentric streets there is an abundance of little mansions, of very independent taste, from Gothic gables and timbered overhung Tudor messuages, to dignified Queen Anne façades and Georgian solidities.

If you diverge from the main street up one of the steepest of cobbled ascents, at the top of the hill you are confronted with a real miracle of Georgian fancy, in the shape of a beautiful white-casemented bow-window, at some little height above the street, with a pediment above. Underneath it the street turns sharply to the left ; and past a long wall of mellow brick, and a house with a strangely curved chimney-stack, you catch a glimpse of the west gable and turrets of the stately church, and the low-pointed spire above. But to the right of the bow-window and at right angles to it, is a very stately little façade of pale red brick with urns on the corners of the parapet, and old insurance signs on the brickwork, and with a high canopied doorway of singular grace ; next below that is another compact little front, with round-headed windows, of ruddy brick. On the wall appears a votive tablet ; for this is the house where for twenty happy years Henry James lived and worked, and threw his eager sympathies and ardent inquisitiveness into the life of the friendly and admiring town.

The house was built by a prosperous burgess of Rye, Lamb by name, who established an almost

dynastic right to the Mayoralty ; you enter the portal by a singular arrangement. You seize the big brass knocker and twist it sharply to the right, and thus unlatch the door.

Inside the ingress is more guarded than one would think necessary ; an array of bolts, latches, keyholes, chains makes it possible to fasten the door in nine different ways.

You find yourself in a fair-sized panelled hall painted white, with a white balustraded staircase rising opposite to you. On your right is a tiny panelled room, perhaps a waiting-room or *cabinet de travail*, for the Mayor had doubtless many callers. On the left a small oak-panelled parlour, looking on the garden, and also to the church ; beyond that a small dining-room with a curious alcove or chancel built out of it, providing some unexpected acoustics. Under the stairs you pass to offices, a spacious high kitchen with due appurtenances.

Going upstairs you find yourself in another panelled lobby. On your right, a small square panelled room which looks out to Winchelsea and to the garden ; next to that a finely panelled room in oak, over the parlour. Opposite you what must have been a powdering closet, a slip of a room, with a balustraded screen close to the ceiling ; to the left a big bedroom, looking out on the street ; there is one more room on that floor, a panelled room with a handsome pedimented cupboard, leading to a bathroom.

Above this four comfortable attics ; and there is also a room or two in the round-windowed annexe of which I spoke, down the street.

But further, if you pass through the parlour into the garden, you find a little flight of steps to the left, which lead up into the room with the bow-window which I first described, looking into the street. This is a spacious library full of books.

The house is in fact a perfect specimen of the house of a busy burgess of the eighteenth century. All the rooms, except the library and the hall, are very small, and the house could only accommodate a small family party, with no room for entertainment. Probably the Mayor worked in the little room off the hall ; the Mayoress sate in the parlour. The dining-room holds about six or eight. Four bedrooms above for the family ; four above for the servants. The garden-room was probably only used for ceremony, as at a Cinque Port banquet.

But in spite of the minuteness of it, the house has real charm and dignity. There is nothing pretentious but also nothing squalid or unhand-some. Every inch of it is for use, and yet it has all a flavour of distinction and courtesy.

It is curious and pleasant that this dainty little house has twice had a royal guest. Once the Duke of Cumberland stayed here on Cinque Port business ; and once George II, driven to land from his yacht by stress of weather, spent a day or two. He slept in the panelled bedroom that was Henry James's, looking to the church. A tiny engraving of him hangs near my bed, with his stubborn jaw, his face lined with self-assertion and peevishness, and his protruding crab-like eyes. He had a dislike to being painted ; but there is a portrait of him at Audley End which allows one

to realise his consequential strut, his obtrusive self-importance, his snappish irritability of temper, his indubitable spirit. Dull and muddled as his grip of affairs was, there can seldom have been a man so entirely sure of himself and of his innate fitness to rule a great nation. Here at least he showed a gallant courtesy, for a child was born in the house on the very day of his arrival, to which he stood sponsor, and gave a gold cup which is still preserved.

When Henry James lived there—I stayed with him some twenty years ago here—he had turned the little upstairs room, looking to Winchelsea, into a study. There he sequestered himself, and from below you could hear him stride and pause and stride again, his voice, as he dictated to his typist, sometimes booming and re-echoing, sometimes insinuating itself upon the air with an unemotional dryness.

He assigned me the little room downstairs to write my letters in. He was very solicitous for the happiness of his guests, but guarded himself by saying that he would be invisible until luncheon. "You will forgive me—but resolute, inflexible, accumulated *habit*, is the only condition of progress in my little efforts . . . my little constructions!" He used to come in, lay a friendly hand on one's shoulder, look mutely and searchingly at one's face. "Cigarettes . . . stamps?" Yes, I needed both, and in two minutes he was back again, his hands full, showering them down on my table—a little cascade of cigarettes, a little flight of stamps.

The parlour seemed never used. In the dining-

room we had excellent meals, protracted by talk, served by a dilapidated serving-man not decisively sober in aspect. In the afternoon we walked "inflexibly," but it was difficult to extricate ourselves from the town, he had such urgent communication to make to all we met. Sometimes a handshake and a pathetic motion of his head. A bluff gentleman would be button-holed, a cryptic sentence murmured in his ear, and his face eagerly scanned for the resultant emotion. A tradesman at the door of his shop would be rallied on the radiant prosperity of Rye ; a girl would be stopped, paternally admonished, and sent away wreathed with smiles.

We emerged at last, and threaded an upward lane to Playden. A dog-cart approached swinging bumpingly along, gingerly guided by a roseate parson. "Look out for James Bryce," murmured Henry James to me in swift-guarded tones. The dog-cart was checked. "Ah, Mr. James, good morning. Seen our friend James Bryce lately ?" "Not *very* lately." "Well, you will recall me to him when you meet !" "Naturally—indeed inevitably." The worthy priest passed on. "There," said Henry James, "an excellent man—but the tenuity of human resources ! I am inextricably bound up in that good fellow's mind with James Bryce—with whom my acquaintance is of the slenderest—and invariably thus interrogated ; but after all, what a comfort when one's friends strike the hour punctually !"

One evening he took me to tea at the Dormy House, and we consumed together, with great abstraction on his part, a pile of tea-cakes. There

it was just the same, an endless series of special communications to member after member—nothing vague or general—each message exactly adapted to the range and scope of each personality.

After dinner we sat and talked ; and when I withdrew, he attacked a pile of letters, and wrote, without an erasure in that great flowing hand, those wonderful letters, so full of subtlety and tenderness and humour, so majestically phrased, so emphatically qualified.

It was winter then, and I do not remember that much stress was laid upon the garden. It is there, however, perhaps an acre in all, the upper end a kitchen-garden with a long greenhouse. Then a trellis ; and then a trim lawn, with creeper-clad brick walls, and beds of roses and annuals. He pointed out to me a big annexe here, belonging to the house, a studio evidently, which he let, with a handsome pillared entrance in the adjacent street ; and behind the house was a quaint cobbled court, with a Dutch air of neatness, and glossy plants in pots, and another entrance into another street,—“ Full of bolt-holes, you will observe ! ”

The garden is however overlooked by the back windows of houses ; and about this he was somewhat sensitive. He planted rows of poplars for a screen, and erected high trellises on the walk. The going and coming of predatory cats was also a cause of sorrow to him. The garden had a mulberry tree, very ruinous, a quaint drooping ash, like a vast umbrella of green, a thorn-tree or two.

The whole little domain was evidently a great and active pleasure to Henry James. It was a real retreat, and made a venerable and dignified

little background for his courteous and genial personality. Perhaps as the years went on and his marvellous overflowing intellect and emotion ebbed a little, he found the constant advent of self-invited guests a strain upon him. No wonder, for he spent himself so liberally upon them ; he was not content with current trivialities—every one of his friends was analysed, pictured, defined ; and he bent his perceptions and his goodwill alike urgently and caressingly upon each.

Another charm of the house is that his nephew and heir, also Henry James, has left, with the best sort of piety, most of his uncle's books, furniture, pictures and mementoes *in situ*. Much of the furniture is solid, old and beautiful. There is a fine bronze bust by Mr. St. Gaudens of Henry James, with the earnest, strenuous, deliberate air of the original, and a cast from a beautiful bust of a young Italian nobleman of the Cinquecento period. The books excite my curiosity—many solid calf-bound classical volumes, French in particular, many gift books, but the books have not the air of a student's books, and seem to have been consulted rather than read. The furniture and apparatus of the house do not bear the impress of connoisseurship or precise selection, but rather of a careless natural good taste, rather indifferent to surroundings.

Many of the pictures are personal gifts and mementoes ; but there is the same carelessness of effect as there is at Kelmscott, no touch of the artistic purist, but a scheme of dignified comfort, as of a place fitted to live in with a seemly appropriateness, not a design to spend thought upon.

But somehow the house is pervaded by his personality, his benign kindness, his noble presence, his rich sympathy, his generous outlook. For nearly five years now I have had the inestimable privilege of living here in my vacations with my brother ; and no day passes without constant thoughts of Henry James's grave regard, his kindly irony, his swift and eager friendliness. I sit this evening in his little study, with a glance into the quiet bird-haunted garden with its encircling walls, its quaint investiture of gables and chimneys ; or I look westward over the falling slope, tier after tier of garden walls and orchards, over the high black timbered warehouses of the port, to the green alluvial plain of the River Brede, with the steep little green bluffs, once a sea-cliff, and the shadowy tree-crowned hill of Winchelsea, and the high blue range of Fairlight Down. I account it one of the great blessings of my life that I could call Henry James my friend ; and have the sense of his tolerant and undeservedly tender regard ; to live here keeps alive the memory of his fine and eager handling of life, and his rich contemplation of its inconsistencies and mysteries. There is nothing so restorative, so inspiring as such memories as these, of a character so ardent and unfaltering in its pursuit of beauty, so unstained by any touch of baseness or selfish acquisitiveness. For all this I am grateful both for the beauty *that was there*, for all that I owe to him, and for the treasured nearness that nothing has power to obliterate.

VII

LYMPNE

THERE is something both noble and romantic about the sight of Lympne from the great green flat of Romney Marsh. It has in the highest degree the sense of *quality* about it. From the edge of the plain the long bastion of the upland rises very steeply, not like the soft outlines of the down-land softly moulded by rain and sun, but with the brisk and peremptory lines of an old sea-cliff that has crumbled down, and with the mounds and curves of former landslips plainly visible. Here and there are patches of hanging wood, but most of it is pasture-land, with a steep rim of bluffs at the top that look almost like an ancient earthwork, so uncompromising is the moulded glaxis.

At Lympne itself, there is a deep coombe carved downwards across the cliff-front by a stream, and this is densely wooded, not with an artificial air of plantations, though some art may have gone to the afforesting of it, but an irregular wood of oaks interspersed with open spaces and thorn-thickets, while the rough pasture is curiously

streaked with the humps and ridges of landslides. Few houses are visible, and those embosomed in the woodland ; but on the very crest of the upland is a long fantastic and mediæval pile of towers and curtain-walls and ramparts and tiled roofs. To the left it is a castle, to the right a church with a great blind tower and ashlar surfaces pierced with narrow windows against the volleying sea-winds.

It is like a scene from a fairy-tale, the old crumbling castle looking out with its patient guarded windows above the greenwood. It has a thrill of chivalrous adventure. If I had known it as a child, I thought, how many a story that I read I should have linked with this soaring fortress, which has so little that is grim about it, so much that is generous and bold.

Little seems to be recorded of the building. The church hard by was the work of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, soon after the Conquest ; and probably there was a watch-tower as well ; but the castle dates from Henry V, and was known as the Archdeacon's House, a castellated residence of the Archdeacon of Canterbury, who as possessor of the right of enthroning all Bishops of the Southern Province was a big enough ecclesiastic to have a little castle of his own. After the Reformation it became a mere farm. Now, alas, a plutocratic owner has added on the landward side range upon range of smug buildings of stone, not only lacking in dignity and interest but also preventing any sight of the beautiful little castle, except through a postern in a modern gateway which is generally closed. How true it is that the

Englishman does not mind being unable to look out of his own window if only he can prevent everyone else from looking in.

The long line of towers and turrets is closely linked with a great Norman cruciform church, splendidly massive and rude, which must have been an abode of darkness in old days but for a few pinfold windows. Inside it is a confused mass of huge piers and columns and arches. It is mostly built out of stones not quarried for the purpose but shovelled out of the enormous pile of Roman masonry which lies below.

For romantic and venerable as the church and the little castle are, they are nothing to the strange spectacle that meets you, if you totter down a narrow stony lane from the village among brushwood, over which a round tower of the castle juts out like the tower in *Rapunzel*. You are soon in the pasture, and there, over a space of ten acres on the steep hill-front are the tumbled masses of masonry, huge solid walls and crumbling ramparts of a great Roman burgh. It is hardly possible to conceive a more venerable and astounding sight than these great piles of masonry. They look as though they had been tumbled over by an earthquake, but probably the disintegrating force was only water and shifting sand. They were here eight hundred years before Lanfranc built his church ; for this is the vast walled fort of Limenus or Lemanis, with a harbour just below where the marines of the Romano-British fleet had their quarters.

The ruins have not been systematically explored, and very little has ever been found in the way of

memorial slabs, coins or pavements to indicate how the sailors lived within these vast walls, the strength and solidity of which are amazing.

In Roman days no doubt the marsh consisted of islands and spits of sand all penetrated by estuaries and sea-channels ; and here the stones of the quays have been discovered. The ruins of a great villa have been excavated, probably the residence of the commandant. But otherwise we are much in the dark about the conditions of the town. All that can be said is that it was probably the chief Roman port of embarkation, and that the space between these great crumbling bastions was filled with huts and storehouses, to protect them from the rapacity of the Britons of the upland. Now these vast coagulations of stone and cement stand some upright *in situ*, some leaning and overthrown in the steep ridged pasture—woods above them and beside them, and stretching away from their feet the interminable green levels of the marshland.

But to see the marshland we must return to the church, for from the churchyard and the natural terrace in which it stands is an incomparable prospect. The great level looks like a carpet unrolled, and all with that concentration of tint which comes when one sees the world afar off. Here and there are clumps of trees and scattered hamlets—everywhere a network of dykes and ditches. You can see the great towers of New Romney and Lydd ; the marsh curves like a scimitar, and at the point of the sharp green horn you can discern the black and white bulk of Dungeness lighthouse standing all alone with a

few huts and coastguard houses in the vast plain of orange shingle dotted with scrub. Far away to the right are the pointed hill of Rye, the line of Camber sands and the shadowy end of the Isle of Oxney. Though this great expanse has not the variety of hill-seen plains, yet in its level design and its richness of colour it gives a great rarity of pleasure, while all about it stretches the opalescent sea, with great shadow ships crawling upon the waters, the smoke mounting high upon the air.

It is hard to define what the singular quality of Lympne is. In part perhaps the Roman fortress, the Norman church, the mediæval castle and the huge aerodrome on the top of the upland, appear like wide leaps or bounds of time and they give one a sense of pride in the patience and continuity of man. I do not take much delight in trying to picture each building as it was in daily use. I do not know which life I should have been least contented with—the Roman dock-town, the dark brine-drenched church—the rough little castle; though I do not know that I do not prefer any of them to the life which the new luxurious buildings seem to indicate.

It may be a clumsy folly to try to investigate at all why one is so stirred by it all. It is strange and old and new, a space of sky full of sailing clouds and loud winds, and haunted by many threats of nature and mute voices of men. Most of all, it is in this corner of England that there seems to brood and beckon all the tangled strains of conquest and settlement that seem so fortuitous

and yet welded together our nation into so firm
and distinct a creation. Such a welter of life and
death and urgent businesses :

“ But the news of dying goes
No further than the breeze.”

VIII

THE FOREST

I DID to-day what I do not often have an opportunity of doing. Perhaps it would not be good to do it often, because there is a curious fascination about it, which seems to have an almost dangerous quality.

I was alone, and the day had a rare beauty ; an early autumnal day, hot in the sun and with a tonic coolness in the shade. I went off early in the afternoon, and spent several hours wandering alone in a forest. There is an immense tract of forest country round about Balcombe. The Brighton line runs through it, between Three Bridges and Hayward's Heath. I do not know how it has been preserved. Some of it is very ancient forest ground indeed, with huge old trees standing out above the copses, and with no sort of orderliness about the planting. It is full of lonely tracks which meander about quite unplanned. Here and there one finds a cottage or a little bit of pasture-land ; at one place there is a lonely brick-kiln with a few stacks of mouldering bricks. Sometimes one walks through a tract of firs, breathing that rapturous fragrance of oozing sun-warmed turpentine. It is dark in there, with the dry soft pine-needles under-foot, and the

breeze sighing in the high foliage like a gently falling sea. Or one walks on a heathery upland, with a few birches hanging loose and light ; at the bottom of the dingle a spring soaks out of the rushes, and runs among a grove of alders. Sometimes, where the ground is high and open, one has a wide view of solemn hills rising one behind another, all wooded to the top, standing in an expectant stillness, in the autumn haze ; at another place is a great grove of Spanish chestnuts, laden as to-day with their green-spiked nut-clusters. Occasionally one crosses a sandy road with deep wheel-tracks, and hears far off in the wood the chopping of wood-cutters at work. Here one comes to a few acres of pasture, and then the wood closes in again. At one place I crossed a great high road, but I was soon in a further tract of the forest known as Shelley Plain, called after the family of the poet. Here the character of the whole changes. It is a great broad heathery valley, all shut in by distant woodlands. Here the Arun rises, and there is a great lake, called a hammer-pond, of the kind common in Sussex, and made, I believe, to get water-power for the iron workings, by the simple expedient of running a great solid dam across the valley, and letting the triangle so formed fill with water. This is a large lake. The pine-trees come down to it on all sides, and the edges are fringed with rushes and water-lily pads. It lay to-day in an oily stillness, with here and there the rings made by a rising fish, and with the autumn mist brooding above it.

Strange to say, to-day I did not see a single

living person, except that once far-off an old wood-cutter passed slowly among the trees, and stood for a moment to look at me. The birds were silent, except for the occasional sharp, sweet piping of a robin hidden in the brake.

There is a curious feeling of awe in a wood, I think, which never becomes distinctly a terror, but is still in the region of fear. I wonder what that is? I believe it is a very old inheritance indeed—a watchfulness, which comes down from primitive times, of concealed enemies or wild beasts. The instinct is there, brought down no doubt from countless centuries of savage life, so deeply set in the soul that no usage or familiarity can dislodge it. It is that which gives such a ramble its peculiar quality. In open country and on trodden roads, one can get absorbed in a train of familiar thought; but in a wood, this is not so; the mind seems strangely alert all the time. The trees themselves have shapes and presences. The beeches scan one in a sinister way out of dark eye-holes under twisted horns; the pines look down protectingly; the birch seems a sort of forest nymph with a tripping air. The ash—the most beautiful I think of all forest trees, with its smooth bark and feathery foliage—has a shy and wilful look.

The spirit of the forest is beautifully caught and rendered in that wonderful book of George Macdonald's, *Phantastes*, which I used to read as a child, and which is all full of the romance of the woodland. The trees there are foes or friends, and I have always regretted that he makes the ash into a sort of forest demon, haunting the

wayfarer's path, and striving to clutch at him with knotted hands. But it is true, none the less, that to go alone in a wood seems a sort of invasion. As in George Meredith's *Woods of Westermain*, the refrain :

" Enter these enchanted woods,
Ye who dare ! "

beats like a pulse through the mind. They are indeed enchanted ! The place is full of life—rooted stationary life ; and one is not sure whether there is not something abroad which is inimical to man, which would stay his wandering feet and appropriate him if it could. If one fell and died there, the brake would intertwine itself above the bones, and one would sink into the soft earth, enriching the woodland growths with the elements which one had stolen from the vegetable life of the soil. It is perhaps the enmity of the old civilisation for the new. It is impossible for me not to believe that everything which rises from a seed of life, which grows after a strict and unvaried form, and makes leaves of a certain shape, has not a real consciousness of life, however dim ; vegetable things must have a real terror of the nimbler and more inventive creatures who take advantage of their stationary life, hack and hew them so ruthlessly, use their bones and cells for homely purposes. It would be strange but not impossible, if a woodman's shed, built of planks, were a thing of horror to the trees round about, as of a thing made out of their own violent deaths. One cannot conceive what sort of a perception it is, or where it resides ; but if a wild animal, which

has had no hurt from the hand of man, is yet instinctively aware that it must scramble into concealment at his approach, is it not more than probable that trees and flowers have the same uneasy terror of man, made all the more urgent because they are so passive and dumb? That trees and flowers enjoy life, love the sunshine and the rain upon their leaves, rejoice in the leafy spring-time, suffer in the naked winter, is beyond all need of proof. One cannot have life without consciousness, nor consciousness without joy and suffering. I make no doubt that some communications of delight and sorrow pass between them; that the sapling is full of hope, the broken, hollow oak, that can just animate a bough or two with life, has the patient endurance of age, the sense that sweet days come to an end.

And thus I believe that when one wanders through a forest, with that curious sense of something thrilling and vibrating all about one, the atmosphere is, as a matter of fact, full of a vague emotion, and that the brain is conscious of it, just as when one brushes through the gleaming gossamer on an autumn brake. The same sense that one has, without need of speech, of the emotions of people about us, so that we know that there is anger or grief or joy about, the consciousness that one has of the emotions of animals—dumb love and trust, or fear and dread—all this I believe is tingling and undulating through the soul in a woodland. If it is true, as it may well be, that even animals were developed by some far-off ancestry out of vegetable forms, or that, at least, both alike spring from the animate

jelly in the slime of hot mud-flats, when life became first possible upon earth, then doubtless there is some interplay of emotion possible among all living things.

I do not for an instant doubt that, as I walked to-day among the deep woods, some message of thought or feeling radiating from all those forest lives did tangle itself dimly with my brain. There is nothing else which can account for that definite obsession of thought, luxurious enough from the very security in which I went, which haunted me all the time, and never allowed me to forget it for an instant. None the less do I doubt that beautiful as it all was—so beautiful that the sight of those distant tree-tops, those far-off, solemn glades, roused in me at moments a strange passion of yearning for a secret that seemed to be within the reach of my hand—yet there was enmity and mistrust in the air ; some jarring of harmony, some emotion that resented my presence, and was glad when I departed. I was on my guard all the time ; I was a suspected person, ominous, unfriendly, unwelcome.

That is, I believe, the secret of the unrest of the woodland. One dominates it, one disregards it. But one enters it as a spy and as a robber, and there is no joy at one's arrival, because one is a destroyer of ancient peace, and a conqueror who cannot be gainsaid.

The old legends of dryads and nymphs, of fauns and satyrs, of fairies and pixies, are but an attempt, I think, to represent what is not a mere figment of imagination, but a real clash of elements. These woodland deities could, in the

ancient tales, form strange passions and desires for the grace and strength of humanity. The water-nymphs drew Hylas into the forest pool ; and just as animals may grow to have a devotion, which is trustful and unquestioning beyond all mortal devotion, for a human being, so conceivably it might even be with these lower forms of life. They love each other, I do not doubt, in their own way. And I believe that all emotion can be shared. The emotion of a tree might set towards a man, as the emotions of men do certainly centre upon trees. The moment that one stops, gazes, admires, wonders, some unseen current is set in motion. To say that this is possible between a man and an animal, and impossible between a man and a flower, seems to me a foolish dogmatism. I believe myself that these strange motions of the spirit have something far deeper behind them than we dream of ; and no one shall persuade me that to-day as I went through the silent wood, my coming was not in some dim way marked and noted. There was some spirit in the air, something wild and shy, which did affect my own spirit with a conscious pressure only half-interpreted. It was not the same thing as if I had been walking over lonely sands, or among frozen rocks and snow ; life and emotion were awake ; and my own life and emotion, more keenly focussed, more finely organised, moved among those airy currents, stirring them and feeling their impact, as the boat stirs the sleeping pool, writing its visible pressure in ripple and wake, and feeling the soft insistence of the liquid tide.

IX

TREES

I THINK it was Emerson who, in praising Thoreau, said that he was a very intelligent man but inhuman. "Why," he said, "I should no more think of taking Thoreau's arm than of taking the arm of an elm-tree!"

But that is exactly what I should like to do, if I knew how! If there were anything that I could do which an elm-tree would consider to be the symbol of an easy, pleasant, comfortable sort of comradeship, such as taking a friend's arm implies, I would do it all along an avenue! That is exactly how I feel to an elm, a simple, straightforward fraternal amity. It is not a romantic friendship; but I am sure that an elm is an essentially good-natured tree; he is not very wise in the way he anchors himself in the ground; he does not send out long tenacious branching roots, like an oak, for instance. They say that if an oak is uprooted, his roots are very much like his branches, so that his bounding line would be something like a dumb-bell; but the elm sends out his roots into a flat kind of pan, and that is why, when he gets big and solid, he is so easily overturned, when the foliage is full, by a gale. I have seen, alas, many an upturned elm at Eton in

the playing fields, and their roots are quite insufficient to bear the strain of a high wind. But for all that, with his rugged, furrowed bark, his great swelling clouds of leafage, he is one of the most substantial and kindly and honest of trees, of a sober greatness and a stately dignity that no other English tree can boast. As a hedgerow tree, with his lower branches docked, he is rather a scarecrow, but as he stands in an avenue, or in an old park sheltering a big, solid Georgian house, he is the ideal bodyguard of a sensible and settled demesne. I remember well how, as a boy sitting in an Eton schoolroom on a hot midsummer morning, I fell in love with a great elm that stood in full view, with the steady sun shining on his towering green head. I drew a little picture of it in the margin of my book ; and I sometimes come across the sketch now, and remember with a thrill how fine I thought the tree, and what a sudden sense of lofty beauty it gave me, to think how he stood up above the housetops and surveyed the quiet courts below. When autumn comes, and whole branches of the elm become a powdery mass of gold, there is no combination of colour so fine as the rich green of the unfaded branches, and the splendid yellow of the faded foliage. Even if he is not allowed to grow to his full size, but is pollarded, as he often is round about the moated farms of the level Cambridgeshire flats, he makes a beautiful little sturdy tree, with an infinite variety of outline.

Curiously enough I believe that the elm is not an aboriginal tree in England, though he is now so characteristically English. He was introduced,

I think, by the Romans. They used elms for vine-props ; and it shows how oddly one is taught the classics, that when one used to read the constant allusions to the elm as used for vineyard purposes, I always used to fancy a vine with its clustered grapes encircling a gigantic bole. It was never explained to me how horribly the Romans maltreated elms, and it was with a sense of almost horror that I first saw the vineyards of North Italy, and recognised in the poor lopped and tortured sticks which stood in rows in the vineyards, the maimed and disfigured relics of the noble immemorial English elms. The wych-elm is the native English elm, and that is a fine tree too, though it has not the rich, corrugated bark of the ordinary elm ; and there is another elm, which I believe is called the Huntingdon elm, which has a finer and more feathery foliage, but misses the billowy and cloudy outlines of the others.

I do not care nearly so much about the oak. A very old oak, perhaps seven or eight hundred years old, is a fine castellated sort of thing. There are a couple of aged trees near where I live in Sussex, the remains of some ancient chase, with immense circular hollowed trunks, and boughs like the horns of stags, which put out a little flourish of foliage in the spring. But the oak takes a long time before it is dignified, and a young oak is an uninteresting tree, to say nothing of the hideous waste of acorns, which goes to my heart every autumn. The oak is too much like the old, tough, hard-hearted money-getting Englishman, who minds his own business and hates sentiment. The young foliage of the oak is beautiful, when it

stands out tawny in the covert, when the other trees are in full spring leaf ; but the oak is an essentially sturdy, obstinate, uncompromising tree, lacking in native dignity, with serviceableness written on every line and elbow.

The great beech can be a very noble tree indeed, with its smooth silvery bole, its round-lipped holes, where it has lost a branch, and its glossy leaves ; beeches, with full room to expand, coming down a sloping hill, are extraordinarily beautiful ; but they are not friendly trees. There is something almost repellently serene and virginal about them ; and I do not like the way they have of killing all the undergrowth about them.

I confess that the three trees which, with the elm, I love the best are the ash, the sycamore, and the walnut. The foliage of the ash is one of the most lovely things I know, both in colour and form, and the way the tree holds itself together is infinitely graceful. It is in every form, the sapling, the pollard, and the full-grown tree, the most perfectly proportioned of all trees. The old sycamore, such as one sees round lonely stone-built farms in the Lake Country, is another tree of lovely proportions. The faint red tinge of its bark, and the way in which the great masses of foliage are shaped and hung, make it incomparably beautiful. It is grown on these hill-farms for what is called a shearing-tree, the sheep being relieved under its dense shade of their gruesome weight of summer wool. How often have I stood to watch the deft shears cutting away the tangle from a sheep helplessly and idiotically propped between the knees of a shearer, with its foolish eyes closed

in desperate patience, its silly legs stiffly extended !

And then the walnut, which places its leaves like a perfect tapestry of green ; I have often thought I should like to have my room hung with a woven work of walnut foliage, with the almost granular leaves so delicately set ; and what a rich pale gold they become in the autumn, to say nothing of their fresh aromatic savour in the spring-time.

By far the largest of our trees is the great Canadian poplar, but it holds its arms out stiffly and awkwardly, and its foliage is too sparse for perfect comfort. They grow to an astonishing size in well-watered alluvial valleys ; in the plain of the Thames near Eton, they can be seen for miles overtopping the hugest elms ; and when they are cut down their peeled trunks have a creamy smoothness and whiteness that is strangely alluring.

The willow as one sees it pollarded is a pleasant homely tree ; but if it is really left to itself it can become a very stately thing. There are three gigantic willows, which must be of a great age, which grow by a causeway near the Cam that leads from an old river-wharf across marshy ground to a pretty old manor-house called White Hall. I have never seen such magnificent willows, though they are now showing signs of decay.

The lime can be a beautiful tree, though it is generally a good deal hacked about to form an avenue. At Lis Escop, the Bishop's house at Truro, there is a beautiful old lime which feathers down to the ground, and was a delicious cave to sit in on a hot summer afternoon ; and the smell of

fresh lime-buds is delicious, though it can become, as the season advances, a very sickly and unpleasant smell.

The horse-chestnut, again, can be a very grand tree if it is left alone, especially when it is covered in the spring with its "stiff silvered fairies" of pyramidal bloom; and if the Spanish chestnut is allowed to grow freely, it becomes a most noble tree in its age. There are a few gigantic Spanish chestnuts above a house, Tremans, in Sussex, where I have lived for some years; the foliage is beautiful, and the great boughs have a fine curve about them; but they have not the compactness of the well-proportioned tree, they are squat, almost corpulent, and have the air almost of an ancient building.

An old Scotch fir can be a delicious object with its red stem and its velvety puffs of indigo-coloured foliage; a ring of them crowning a knoll are very dignified; while a wood of them has a peculiar charm; the dumb carpet of needles, the aromatic scent of the turpentine, and the soft rustling overhead have a very enchanting effect. It is through close-set woods of fir that one should approach the magical castle at sundown. But one feels them to be an imported tree; I believe they were brought into England by James I, and that is against them.

There are not many trees which can be wholly condemned; but the tree that is almost entirely mean in my eyes is the spruce. It rushes up quickly, and it has always a ragged and dirty air. The larch too, apart from its lovely spring green, its rosy tufts, and its sweet scent, is a feeble tree

of monotonous outline. The Lombardy poplar is a freak, the alder is a despondent and mouldy kind of tree. The mountain ash always seems to me to have something melodramatic about it, and even the birch, lovely as it can be on a sandy slope, against a blue sky, has a sense of deliberate picturesqueness about it which is not wholly satisfactory.

As for seeing trees at their best, the most romantic and beautiful thing in the world is to see them in great wide forest tracts. Even now there are many places in England, where on a hazy summer day one can look out from an eminence, and see nothing but wild wood ; hill after hill, and ridge after ridge, all solemnly clothed with green tree-tops. The sight of miles of dreaming woods is the most beautiful thing in the whole world, full of mysterious, silent life ; and when the breeze comes stirring out of cool valleys, bringing with it that fresh sharp scent of wholesome woodland, every sense is satisfied. There too one may find dim shrouded places, where the moss grows green and fine under the strange horns and eyes of old pollarded beeches, in a gloom of fallen daylight ; and one passes out again into a wide heathy space, where the birch leaves dance and flicker in the sun, all walled round with sombre coverts of close-grown hazels.

Or, again, there are few more satisfactory sights as the western express glides among the steep valleys near Doublebois in Cornwall, than to see great hillsides covered close with dense oak-scrub, falling steeply to a warm valley with little pasture fields round a rushing stream ; or one can have the

delight which I have in a house in the English Lakes where I often stay, of looking down from the high windows over the clustering tree-tops of hanging woods. There one gets the bird's view of the forest top, the sheet of shimmering green, dipping steeply to the valley.

But of all the beautiful effects of trees, I know nothing in the world more lovely for pure colour than to go across the moorland in the Lake Country in the autumn, and to find a steep stream splashing down a cleft. Those clefts are all fringed with little maples and mountain ashes, which have been moulded by the wind among the rock-ledges into all sorts of strange shapes. In the autumn the leaves of these miniature straggling thickets turn to the most exquisite symphony of orange and blood-red, which blends most delicately with the heather of the moor and the dark faces of the crag.

There is something endlessly wonderful to me that these strange semi-rhythmical forms and colours, the thing all evolved from within on some perfectly distinct design, should have such an emotional power over the mind. The long life of trees, the characters they lend to some familiar scene, their dumbness and unapproachableness, their secret ebb and flow of life, their patience and serenity, at once so strong and so helpless, their very stationariness—all these evoke a quite peculiar emotion. It is strange to love living things so much, their grace, their fragrance, their tender forms and outlines, and yet to be so wholly unable to hold any kind of communication with them. Yet it may be that we and they alike have been

evolved from some common source of life ; while I can hardly believe that they have not some dim consciousness of life and identity, their seasons of sorrow and joy. How the heart leaps up at the sight of some well-loved tree standing on some familiar site ! How closely entwined with one's sense of home and resting-place ! They have seen the generations come and go, climbing higher and higher into the upper air, and burrowing deeper and deeper to the silent springs beneath. Yet we condemn them, these great quiet creatures, when we tame them to our service, to be sterile. Think of the vast shower of sailing seeds that with an infinite hope the tree each summer sends flying into the air. Yet if but one or two find lodgment, and begin their own new life as saplings, we root them out and cast them away. And then at last the old tree itself totters to its fall ; fuller each year becomes its output of leaf, while its heart turns to powder, and the great fungus oozes from its dying stem. The birds that sang or nested in its branches have deserted it for greener fastnesses. Only the woodpecker taps and chips in its tindery trunk, and the crow sits sinister on its horned branches, prophesying doom.

X

THE ADVENTURE

I WONDER if, by any choice of words or weaving of phrases, I can hand on to another the wonderful delight I found to-day in an adventure so small that there seems nothing to tell. An artist could give something of it with a pen and paper or a few washes of paint. But words are not very powerful things, and the worst of it is that the most they can do is to evoke another picture out of a reader's memory, and not what I saw at all ; besides, more than half the joy of it was, I suppose, that the caged spirit within me fluttered its wings, and leapt from perch to perch, and was glad, remembering some sunlit glade, perhaps, of the green wood where it was born, and yet not desiring, for that moment at least, to be free.

It was in a high bare bit of country, a wide wold of clay and gravel, which I have visited before. If you walk there across the plough-land you will see many times, sticking in the furrows, big and clumsy-looking fossil shells, which bear an even clumsier name (*gryphæa*). They seem to be made of many layers of a flinty stuff, deposited, I suppose, out of the slime of the soft slug-like creature which lived in them. The shell has a blunt round nose, which turns over in a single whorl upon itself ;

and you can find too, at times, the little hinged door with which the creature could shut his house up if danger threatened, after drawing his soft foot within. So I suppose it was once a sea bottom, where the shells crawled in sun-warmed shallow waters full of weed.

I went further afield than usual. There are but few trees hereabouts, in the hedgerows, with here and there a spinney ; and I came to a drift-road, that is a grassy highway, very old, no doubt, and so little frequented that it was not worth metalling. It was full of bramble-brakes and thistle-patches, and the ditches were full of willow-herb. Then I saw trees ahead of me, some of those stunted pollarded elms, which have a gnarled and personal look ; and soon the drift-way widened out, and I saw I was in a small hamlet, a handful of white-walled thatched cottages, with pretty gardens, a fruit-tree, and some vegetable-rows, and a border of old-fashioned flowers. There were little trodden paths everywhere, and at one place there was a mound with the stump of a cross—I dare say its steps were buried in the mound—and a big boulder, with some odd carved cavities in it, the use of which, long forgotten, I was soon to discover. Then I saw that among the trees stood a little old chapel, of rubble-stone smeared with plaster, and stone coigns. It had no tower, only a pretty stone belfry where there hung a bell of green bronze ; the rust of the bronze had melted over the stones, which were stained a delicate green. There were some old headstones about, prettily carved, with emblems covered with lichen, leaning at curious angles. The chapel

was fastened up, but peering in at a window I discerned warped oak benches, and a quaint organ, very small, with a gilded fan of pipes, and an altar at the east with sun-faded hangings. I came away from this, and took my way over a stile into fields, by the side of a considerable pool of waters, full of weed, with little fishes darting in clear spaces, and bright beetles racing in circles in a dizzy kind of dance. There was much arrow-head in the water, with green spear-shaped leaves, and white flowers with a heart of dark crimson. Then on a little rising ground I saw two figures. They were looking away to the south, where a dark storm was coming up, heavy clouds of dense blackness, with lurid copper-coloured spaces; and underneath it the woods and fields looked as if they were in a mist of greyish impalpable dust.

The figures were those of a very old man and a boy; the old man had put his hands up over his eyes to see the storm-cloud more clearly, and the boy had imitated him, so that they had an ominous look as they watched in silence the blackness creeping up the wind.

I came up with them and spoke to them. The old man was lame but upright, with a weather-worn face, cheeks like the sides of a ripe apple, and a straggling beard—such a face as you can see in an old glass window, warped and hardened by endless toil, and yet kindly and patient, with wide grey eyes. The boy was dark-skinned and graceful, a handsome shy creature. The old man talked in a high tremulous voice. He told me that he was eighty-three years old, and that the

boy was his grandson. The boy looked at each of us in silence as we spoke. I said that it was a lonely place, and he said "Yes," and that few people ever came there—"it is amidst the fields here," he said simply. He told me that it was the hamlet of a larger village, and that the parson came over for an afternoon service on Sundays, and in rough weather not always that. He said he had lived there all his life, and he told me that when he was a boy there were stocks on the green. "You saw a big stone, maybe," he said; "yes, they were set in that." He had seen a man sit there, he said, but he could not remember why he was put there. Then he moved away home, the boy following him, saying, "We shall have a bit of weather on us in a minute." I stood and watched them go, the old man shuffling away, and the boy jumping about beside him, asking him many questions. They were soon lost to sight among the trees; I myself sheltered under a tough and ancient thorn-tree, which grew beside the road, while the grey slanting rain lashed the fields, and a light mist rose from the hot ground.

That was all my adventure; but it had a fine quality about it—the lonely hamlet lost in the fields, the grassy spaces, the dark trees, the chapel in its graveyard, the pool, and the swiftly racing shadow of the storm over all.

It was still and old and beautiful, a small and unnoticed backwater of life, a community with its slender traditions, and with the simplest life that can well be lived anywhere. But even here was every element of life—childhood growing up in

wonder and excitement, love, fatherhood, motherhood, daily toil, health, sickness, death, all accepted, nothing understood—nothing speculated about or resented, few hopes, some quiet happiness, a few dumb and pathetic fears.

Yet it contains within it all the mysteries of life ; and part of its mystery is its incommunicableness. For if I had tried to explain to the old man all the things that I do and think of, all the countless strands of interest and delight woven into my own tapestry of life, he would not even have dimly perceived what I meant. Part of the charm of the place is the dignity of its simplicity and of its silence, the murmur of its breezes, the shadows of its clouds ; the flowers that come up year by year in the accustomed places, the renewal of its leaves and grasses, the starry depths of the night, the flushing of the dawn over its interminable fields, the burning of the sunset over its far-seen woods, and in the hearts of its dwellers a half-unconscious love of its familiar curves and shapes.

For me, at least, seen thus suddenly and, perhaps, never to be seen again, it has the beauty of a symbol. It is not that I think that the people of the place understand its secret. Its secret is for me and not for them. To them it is just a background of a life that has no expression ; to me it is the beckoning of a spirit, a voice speaking in a tongue which I know to be beautiful, but which I cannot understand, and leaving with me a longing, not to be satisfied, for a peace which the world cannot give, and yet which is very near me, if I could but find the way thither.

XI

WATERSPRINGS AND FRESHETS

THERE was a big extent of unfenced pasture-land not far from Eton, called the Bradmass—which I take to mean the Broad Marsh. It was a mile or so away from the river, and had evidently at some not very distant date been an open fen ; the soil was spongy to the foot, and orchids grew there abundantly.

On hot summer days I often made a solitary pilgrimage there ; it was a great delight to escape after a long morning spent in an over-warm schoolroom, teaching boys the niceties of Latin and Greek, which surely had even less relation to life than usual in weather which seemed to entreat the young and restless to flock out into the elm-shaded playing fields or to the deep backwaters of Cuckoo Weir winding among the high meadow-grass. Many of my colleagues used to drift off to the cricket-grounds and survey the games with sympathetic and critical eyes. But healthy and good-humoured boyhood, however amiable and pleasant, is apt to be so very much alive, and so unconscious of its doom, that even to watch it at play puts a subtle strain upon the mind. I am not a lover of unmitigated solitude by any means ; but as an interlude in an over-gregarious life it has a blissful quality.

And so I would make my way out of Eton by Philippi, then a place of gravel pits overgrown with brushwood, by the village green of Eton Wick, and then one was sure of solitude indeed. Down one side of the Bradmass was a little sauntering stream much overgrown ; but in one place the bed of it widened into a small circular pool—which was my goal—for at the bottom, among grey sand and bits of waterlogged wood, the clear water came silently up from a black orifice, cool in the fiercest summer heat, and dimpling crystalline and liquid-rimmed in the centre of the pool.

I so well understand the Roman worship of a spring—it was their custom to throw in a piece of money as a votive offering, and I have done it myself before now, out of the real and primitive desire to give something in return for a sight so simply wonderful and beautiful. Think of it—on starlight nights, when the pasture aches with frost, in the sweet summer dusks and dawns, day after day, year after year, up gushes the crystal stream.

There are places, of course, where the thing is done on an incredible scale, like the great circular pool in the Bishop's garden at Wells, where the water rushes up leaping and bubbling, and a great stream flows away ; or the strange spring at Shingay, near Wimpole, where the water comes up at such tremendous pressure that it rises to the top of a pierced oaken post set in a fence, and drips over, five feet above ground ; or under the huge white cirque of rocks known as Malham Cove, three hundred feet of sheer precipice, with hardly

a ledge, where the river runs out at the very foot of the limestone scar, among boulders and hazel thickets ; or at Ashwell, near Royston, where in a great pit beside the village street a dozen trickling streamlets fill a shallow pool under the shadow of the ash-trees ; or at the Nine Wells near Cambridge, where in a field of thorn-thickets, marked by a stone obelisk, nine several springs spill their wealth of water, to form the conduit known as Hobson's, which runs cheerfully through Cambridge beside the curb past Peterhouse and Pembroke, and flows across the Master's garden at Christ's in a deep channel among stately and exotic water-plants, with a gleam of goldfish, to disappear beneath a brick-built shrine, under a bronze bust of Charles Darwin ! Or stranger still is the round pool in a wooded marshy valley near Horsted Keynes, where a great gush of water of a gem-like green rises up, so soaked with iron that it is bitter and astringent to the taste, and reddens the stream into which it flows with its chalybeate rust, for many a yard ; or even more terrifying at Gilsland, near the Roman wall, where under dark precipitous rocks a warm milk-like water drips into a stone basin, and fills the little cove with the demoniacal smell of sulphur, that appears to have almost an enmity for the human race, so designedly foul it seems.

All these, however, are sensational surprises, where nature seems to be showing off in a melodramatic way. They are beautiful or astonishing or both ; and I can imagine a primitive man having a real terror of places in which the earth cast up so intently and largely, with the noise of

the water-pipes, the very ichor of its veins. There are indeed at two places I have seen, intermittent springs, where the mind can hardly persuade itself that some conscious agency is not at work. One of these is in a wood at Exning, St. Mindred's Well, where the water sleeps silently in the middle of the copse, and then gives a sudden shiver, and a score of little bubbling pulses fret the surface, and all is silent again. Most marvellous of all is the ebbing and flowing well, near Settle. In wet weather it runs freely, in a drought hardly at all ; but between the two it disgorges itself so strangely that one can hardly believe one's eyes. It is by the high road from Settle to Ingleton, under a steep limestone scar much overgrown with thickets. There is a homely stone trough, hewn roughly out, the top some three or four feet from the ground. The only noticeable thing is that at each end of the trough, an inch or two below the rim, is a hole for the water to escape from if the trough is full.

I had often passed by it, but it would never reveal its secret ; but one day I went by it, and was passing on, when a man, whom I still bless, who was standing beside it said to me, " I think it is just going to begin." I stepped to the trough. There was only a little water in it, and from a rough pipe, which came out of the rock, there was a little drip. Suddenly without any warning there came a deluge of water out of the pipe, gurgling and lapping and clucking and filling the trough in a moment : but just as it rose to the rim, from one end of the trough there shot out a thing, just under the surface, which looked like a solid, brightly burnished silver spike, pointed

at the end and nearly an inch thick. This kept darting into the trough and retiring. Then I saw that a similar spike was darting and retiring out of the other end of the trough. They suddenly joined ; and from end to end there lay this smooth rod of brightest silver, looking as though one could grasp it and brandish it.

It was a stupefying performance ; but it was all over in an instant. Suddenly the flow stopped, the silver rod parted and vanished, the water gushed from the holes at either end, and a moment later it was just a homely trough half full of water with a dripping pipe above.

All this marvel has been explained, of course. You may buy a pamphlet with diagrams. But I will say no more on this head, except that the silver rod is nothing but a pair of vortexes, and that what gleams and flashes within it is not silver but imprisoned rushing air.

But water is after all the eternal symbol of all that we most desire, and a landscape without water is a landscape without charm ; whether it comes dashing down in a wooded cleft, among great boulders, and ridged slabs of rock, brown with the peat of the hill-marshes and with a gleam of fallen gold in the rushing spray ; or whether it floats, a sun-dappled mirror, fringed with meadow-sweet and loose-strife, depth within depth along the many-herded plain, or dashes fresh over the lonely weir among deserted fields with the sweet scent of broken waters, or curves and scoops among high banks of red loam through level pastures, it always has the same coolness and purity, the same power of transfiguring into

something new and surprising whatever it conceals or reflects, the same gentle and resistless advance, the same timid yet overwhelming power ; it is the type of all healing and refreshment, all silent rebellions, unhurried advances, unclaimed victories. It stands for the joys that need no asserting, for the love that makes no protestations, the patience which no force can thwart. It is the quickener of life ; however soiled, it is incapable of retaining the taint, however bound and ill-used, it has the secret of escape, however wild and dreary its wanderings, it returns faithfully to perfect peace and quiet.

It seems to me strange that of the two possible symbols for the strongest forces of life, religion has chosen fire as its token. There is nothing so arresting as fire, from the fact that at its touch the harmless substance of the world leaps into fury. But fire can only unbuild and disperse, and its hostility to life is fierce and furious. I wish that water could have been chosen as its symbol ; as St. Francis of Assisi said, " Let us praise God for our sister the water because she is very useful to us and humble and serviceable and clean," and even more because of its beauty of liquid curve and crystalline enchantment and for the eager response that it makes alike to human dreams and human needs, and none the less for its sweet and musical voice.

Who that is familiar with the Great Court of Trinity does not instantaneously connect it with the unseen drip of water in the pillared fountain and the gentle hollow echo that it makes amid the encircling walls ?

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I would have it knit with every shrine and
solemn festival for the sake of the thought of which
Tennyson wrote :

“ All day and all night it is ever drawn
From the brain of the purple mountain
That stands in the distance yonder. . . .
And the mountain draws it from heaven above.”

XII

THE LYRICAL MOOD

Do you know what I mean by the lyrical mood ? It is not quite like anything else in the world. It is when a little sight—it is almost always a sight, and very often a sight seen a hundred times before—opens a sudden door into a certain dim and grand region of thought, a vast and cloudy space, lit up suddenly as by a sailing meteor. One does not understand the hundredth part of what one sees there, but one realises that it is great and august and permanent ; it gives one the sense that there is something splendid and majestic in the background all the time—" the unseen greatness of life."

I had been walking to-day with a companion by forest tracks and heaths and dingles in these lovely Sussex valleys. One slips along by field paths and grass roads ; sometimes crossing a highway, with that pleasant sense that one is not following the traditional and conventional currents of the world, but cutting across them, and living in the old still quiet life of forest and field-tillage that is so unaffected by the urgencies of existence. We came at last to the remnants of an old manorial house, buried deep in woods and now

only to be approached by sandy by-ways. Only a single wing of the house is left, with its great chimney-stacks, its fine mullioned windows. The pleasaunce and the bowling-green and the pool are all there, overgrown with grass ; the old stone facing of the terraced walk that ran along the pool is crumbled down, the stones broken and forced out of place by the dense alders and the pool itself a mass of sedge and water-lilies. All buried deep in thickets and copses, the farm buildings huddled close against the old mansion. A ruin pure and simple is always rather a sad spectacle, and gives a sense of plans broken off, life interrupted, desolation triumphant. But a big house which has lost its splendour, but has pleasantly accommodated itself to homely uses, is rather a refreshing sight, because one feels that it has lost only what is artificial and pompous and gained something unaffected and vital. It has a beauty in its dignified neglect, to which the perfectly appointed house, however venerable, among its well-rolled lawns and rich flower-beds never quite attains, because it stands for so much labour artificially and unproductively employed, such armies of servants and gardeners, such an unreal life framed in the centre of it all.

We stood leaning on a rail and looking at the fine old house, with the westering sun bringing out its mossy tiles, its lichened bricks, its weather-worn cornices. As we gazed, two horses released from the plough, great glossy gentle creatures, came plodding along side by side, with clanking harness, and a fine bronzed silent ploughman tramping beside them. The horses knew the

ritual as well as he did, and never needed a word or a reminder. They came up to the gate and knowing that it opened outwards halted at exactly the right distance from it. The ploughman drew the gate open, the horses went through, side by side, and wheeled sharply to the right, halting again. He came up to them, unloosed their bits, and they went side by side down to the edge of the pool, splashed in for a few feet and then stood motionless with their blunt noses in the water, drawing it up in long silent draughts. The man waited till he thought they had had enough ; then he said a single word, at which they came out of the water, and walked straight, in single file, up to the door of an old weather-tiled stable, until he came up to the door and opened it, when with bowed heads and feet cautious of the threshold, they went clanking in, each into his own stall.

The old simple life of the world ! All day long they had been ploughing the dry soil in the upland above, the dust blowing from the plough, perfectly content, obedient to word and gesture. One does not guess at what their thoughts were, but they were as definite, no doubt, as my own. Memory, anticipation—one cannot say ; but yet they were aware well enough of what they were doing, what was expected of them, with no sense of thwarted will or compulsory toil. And what was the ploughman thinking of ? That is a mystery to me too, but all natural enough, no doubt, if I could but trace it.

But of what an immense chain of life and circumstance this is all the symbol. The horses,

docile and sensible, quite fearless and contented—what a distance from the wild mustang of the forest lawn. Yet some slow and blind force has been moulding them and the ploughman alike—them from the wild horse of the waste, him from the savage of the wood. The old house itself was probably the successor of a long chain of dwellings, the timbered grange, the clay-built hut, the wattled booth.

Every bit of the harness that clanked and swung about them, what a tradition of ingenuity and invention that all stood for—the stitching of leather, the seasoning of wood, the working of metal ; there was not a single strap of that equipment which was not the perfect outcome of some natural tradition of the human mind, making materials serve its turn, improving, accommodating, refining, and with all the joy of labour and use about it. Why it developed so, and why, if it did develop, it came so patiently and slowly, man by man contributing just his touch of improvement and bettering, was the mystery. And the mystery itself stood out more impressively against the background of this wonderful and restless century, with its aeroplanes and telephones and the elaborate appliances of its crowded cities, yet all this has to go on, must go on whatever happens ; and I feel too that it has a beauty and simplicity which the larger range lacks and misses. And then too, I could not help feeling what a stranger product still I myself was, living in the world, commanding its produce, fed by its labour, unquestioningly and uncomplainingly, never having had to raise a finger to

do any part of the primal work of the world, that work which it cannot do without, with society ordaining that I was to be supported and pleasantly housed and clad, without my ever having to fight for my luxuries or enforce my will to live so. Working too in my own way, and yet never working at anything which men could not perfectly well do without, teaching an elaborate culture to boys who did not understand what it was about, and since that time selling my fancies for food and drink and vehicles and leisure, and selling them not even to the men who have had to work to keep me comfortable, who would hardly understand what my fancies were and would have no use for them. Strange indeed, that by even writing down, as I no doubt should do, my thought at the sight of the ploughman and his team I should receive the right to take the results for a week or two of leisure from that very ploughman's toil. How little he thought that he had worked and would have to work that I might lean upon his fence and think my pleasant thoughts. And how impossible that I should explain all that to him, and what a fanciful wretch he would have thought me if I had explained it, or if I had said just that to him, "Shall I tell you why you work? It is no doubt to feed yourself first, but you have to work longer than you need that I may stand here and enjoy thinking how you came to be here, and what a pleasant picture of life and wonder you make for me."

One ought to repay that somehow, and yet I hardly know how. But I have no doubt that when a ploughman works that men of brains may think,

somehow or other the ploughman or his children are being lifted out of the lower life of impulse and coarseness into cleaner conditions, happier days, heightened life. I don't claim to have done my share ; but the leisure of poets and teachers and statesmen is a vitally necessary thing in order that the world may move upwards and onwards ; and the savage who stood for a moment to look at a flower or to listen to a bird's song or to be pleased with the smile on the face of a child was a sign alike and a cause that men could not acquiesce in the brutal struggling striving life of the dirty wigwam and the smoky hut.

What we all want, no doubt, is to fill our lives with something that corresponds more nearly to our hope and our joy. That want is no doubt behind these great industrial struggles, these strikes and anarchies which we say thoughtlessly are so lawless, so unreasonable. It is all a blind desire for something purer and brighter, some spiritual energy and care, some sweet and true vision. These things cannot multiply without leisure and dignity of life ; and though much of such struggle seems a greedy grasping at luxury, a bubbling over of envy and violence, it is a sense of beautiful things unshared, of joys jealously guarded which is behind it all. If we who are on the top could learn to give in time, there would be little need for the rest to take. And we must learn to discern and to trust the impulse behind it, and to trust it all the more, the more we value the ease, the cleanliness, the pleasure in which we live.

That is what I call a lyrical mood, when a little sight stirs a whole chain of thoughts which are not

mere fancies. Where one fails, no doubt, is in being content to delight in the mood, in its luminous signals and remote possibilities. If one could but translate it into action and life ! Not to do so is to run the risk of becoming a mere sentimentalist. And yet it is better to think these things and feel them than not to be touched or moved by them at all. The difficulty is that one feels so powerless to alter the present—for the thing cannot be done by small local philanthropies, or by a proffer of superiorities which it takes an initiation to comprehend.

But I don't believe it to be fruitless to think such things, to wonder at them, to say them ; life is enriched so, and it is at enrichment of life that we all must aim.

XIII

ARIEL

I WONDER if other people, when they are alone and cheerful, and without any definite occupation, ever indulge themselves as I do in pursuing some charming childish fancy ? That is the sort of thing which sensible solid persons will not confess to. What do people, for instance, think about when they are walking alone in the country, or comfortably in bed, before they go to sleep, or lying pleasantly awake on a summer morning ? Sometimes I plan a perfect house for myself, or design a *train de luxe*, containing several saloons, to travel about in. That is a problem full of subtle puzzles ; one must have of course a sort of bow-window at the end of one of the saloons with an uninterrupted view of the country from it ; but in front there is the engine in the way, and if it is at the end it would sway about too much, and how would one keep the smell of cooking from the kitchen carriage out of it ? Then one would want two spare bedrooms in it for friends, and a saloon for them to sit in, and a nice room for the servants to sit in, and a dining-room, besides a study for oneself ; it is very difficult to know how to fit them all in. Or else I plan a college, which I should like to build, in which young men who

wanted to write could have two or three years of uninterrupted work, with plenty of books and pictures and even music before they went out into the world. That takes a deal of careful thinking. Or I establish myself in thought in a Cotswold manor-house, and determine how agreeably I would spend the day, writing in a parlour with mullioned window, hung with green tapestry, and spending the afternoon in trout-fishing in a fine full swirling stream, in water-meadows between low hills. Or if I am in a less cheerful mood, if something has happened to vex me, I sketch out a trenchant letter, or a conversation in which I should always have the last and the best word.

To-day as I walked in the rain among the steep Sussex valleys, with their hanging woods and high-sloping pastures, I thought of Ariel in *The Tempest*; to me he is always one of the most delicious of conceptions—a slim, light-limbed boyish creature, with curly golden hair, grave and serious—Ariel does not smile—but with no touch of sadness about him, and liking best to be alone, avoiding cities and all concourse, caring nothing for men and women who live coarse and greedy lives, in frowsy clothes and close ill-smelling houses, full of ill-humour and envy, and who even when they love, love jealously and foolishly. Ariel has no time to waste—there is so much to see and hear everywhere; but neither does he care how long he spends over anything which pleases him. On a wet and dripping day like this he sits in the heart of the rusty covert, his chin on his hand, looking at the dead leaves; the rain

cannot wet him or the wind chill him ; and he is grave and quiet as the earth as she drinks and stores the stealing rain. Or on a bright windy day, when the blue sky is full of great white sailing clouds, Ariel lies carelessly tumbled among the high soft branches of some tall fir-tree, swaying gently in the wind, with the sun on his delicate limbs or with the cloud-shadows sailing over, till the light slopes to the west, and the clouds become purple islands in a sea of crimson light ; and that too fades into a still green. The clouds are blue as indigo now, and the pheasants leap up crowing to their roosts, but Ariel lies on through the night and sees the stars come out, till the whole sky is like the vaulted roof of some great cave sprinkled thick with gems.

Or he goes further afield, and finds some vast limestone cliff, with the ash-trees sprouting on the ledges, and a clear stream running out at the foot among the wild woodland and the mossy rocks. It is high summer now, and the hot air quivers on the moor ; and Ariel comes drifting over the cliff-edge, and poises like a bee, with his slender feet extended, looking hour by hour at every niche and cranny of the white crag, darting away for an instant and poising again. He does not disturb the flies that sit on the rock-front, cleaning their wings ; here in a cranny drips the purple-blossomed toad-flower ; half a day might be spent in watching that, seeing the green bud unfold and the little tendril creeping over the rock.

Sometimes, just for a contrast, he drops into the market-square of the little town, and watches the

sheep in their pens, and the farmers loafing about ; he hears the clatter of knives in the inn-parlour, and the gross smell of beer and tobacco comes stalely out. Ariel shuts his pretty mouth at that, with its pearly teeth—he cannot breathe in that air, and he is off to the hill, to float over the bilberries, and to see the covey of grouse gobbling the little heather fronds ; the great brown birds hurry about, spreading over the moor in a half-circle, yet always in sight of each other.

Or he meets another Ariel down in the wood ; hand in hand they talk eagerly of all they have seen ; but as neither wants anything for his own, not even a companion, there is nothing to quarrel about, no reason to disagree. The only thing which grieves them is when they see the weasel spring on the startled rabbit, or the swallow catch the gauzy-winged fly as it swoops and skims. Why should life feed upon life, why should the swallow's strength of wing depend upon the gobbled fly ? That is what Ariel cannot understand.

Ariel knows, too, as man does not of the secret dreaming thoughts of flower and tree. They neither see nor hear, perhaps, but they feel the joy of the mounting sap and the brooding sunlight ; they know the sweetness of the winter drowsiness stealing over them, and the glee of the spring's awakening.

Sometimes Ariel wanders on the top of the down on a still moonlight night, where the grassy coombes with their sharp smooth shadows slope sheerly down : he sees the lights of hamlets and

the steam of the speeding train, and then he hears an airy music, the song of a company of spirits passing over singing together in unpremeditated joy. He does not want to join them, but he follows in their track, wondering at the clear melody, till that too fades upon the air, as the east grows pale and the clouds take on a misty hue ; or he drops from the cliff-edge, where the great blue white-crested breakers come thundering in, and falling like a plummet through the broken foam, he is down in a moment in the fallen light of the sea-depths, where the great streamers of weed, brown-ribboned and translucent, poise, as they clutch the shingle with their firm claws. It is wonderful down there, with the solemn-eyed fish poising and darting, the pink-footed shells moving slowly over the rocks, or the lobster holding out his great hands and feelers from a comfortable crevice.

What puzzles Ariel most is the life of men. The children are more intelligible because they have not quite lost the look of spirits, and life is still an exciting game to them. But even they laugh and eat too much, and they are disagreeable to each other. The girl of ten, with her motherly instinct, slaps and pushes her little brother for walking on the road instead of on the path ; or they gather in groups and stare at one who goes alone looking sickly and pale, till he sees them pointing, and then his mouth puckers and he puts up his hand to hide his sobs. But the older men and women are terrible, so cross and pre-occupied, doing the work they like and yet pretending it is done for the sake of others. They have

so little time, thinks Ariel, to do anything worth doing. They drag things about, they cook and sew ; the man comes gruffly home, eats his tea, tells the children to be quiet, smokes, grumbles. But there is something about it all that Ariel cannot quite get hold of. They turn to each other with smiles, the father takes his little girl on his knee, and she curls herself up against his shoulder ; they want each other in some way, and Ariel wants no one. There is some secret about it all which he cannot penetrate. He sees the dying woman in the close room, asking for the children ; they come in, they are afraid of her, they do not like her so ; and there is some strange hunger in her eyes, as the pain comes on again, and the failing eyelids close on the sunken cheeks, and she sees in a mist that she is being drawn away from them into the dark, and she does not want to go. Perhaps it would be worth while to bear all the ugly toil and care to feel like that !

Then as I walked in the gathering dusk I saw the floating vision of Ariel close to me for an instant, the long delicate limbs, the fine hands, the childish face, with the pearly teeth showing through the unclosed lips, the curling hair, and clearest of all the grave passionless eyes, with no answering smile in them, but just a serene untroubled air, a little surprised, a little affronted at the eagerness with which I beheld him. He had no need of anything which I could give him, and he seemed just embarrassed by my friendly gaze. For I loved Ariel just as one loves a clear-hued, delicate, fragrant flower, which is not moved by my worship or my delight, but only mutely desires to live

its own life, and deprecates my power to rend it away from its stem and crush its frail life for the sake of its sweet-scented breath. What a strange thing this sense of barter in love is, this desire to have something worth giving, something to woo with, something to withhold, in a speechless ecstasy of desire. On earth the fairest creature loves to be desired ; but Ariel shrinks from love as a wild creature shrinks from the hand that would clutch it, fearing that I might have some spell to bind him, to bid him make music for drunken sailors or help in a mortal wooing.

Yet Ariel is a real type, I think. I have known men and women who passed through life like that, just watching, judging, appraising, courteous and kind perhaps, yet in a solitude which one could not really ever invade, taking love and friendship simply as things which smoothed the path and made things easier and pleasanter for them. The souls of artists are often like that, and need no one, desire no nearness, and are half-troubled by the signals of a passion which they do not understand. A solitude of perception and thought ! They love life in a way, because it feeds their joy and mirth, and they hate death because it means banishment from the forms and colours and sounds which they love. They are blamed, these Ariels of earth, for heartlessness and indifference, because they welcome the glances and caresses of love, and yet have no loyalty or answering passion to give in return.

Ariel looked at me with a petulant air, like a child interrupted in a game—my thought, mysteri-

ous, disturbing, claiming, caught him like a gossamer web ; but he was too strong for me, he broke away, and I heard him sing softly to himself as he went, a song like the sound of a crystalline sea, breaking gently on a sandy shore, as the dawn comes in across the dark hill.

XIV

ARTISTICISM

SOME years ago I happened to pay two rather interesting visits within a few weeks of each other.

The first was to a wealthy and cultivated financier. He had bought a little manor-house, with a pretty half-timbered front, in a remote part of the Midlands. The house stood very solitary, among woodlands. He had cut and carved these very cleverly, opened up vistas, contrived arched walks, delved a chain of little pools out of a streamlet, laid down velvety lawns of old purchased turf. He had added largely to the house, but in order to do this he had bought the materials of several old cottages and farmsteads in the neighbourhood, and he had used the warped and weathered beams, the lichened tiles, the irregular glazed casements with wonderful skill, so that one could hardly tell where the old ended and the new began ; he had built garden-walls and posts out of ancient brick ; inside the house he had used old panelling in the pleasant low rooms, and he had collected quantities of fine furniture, pictures, tapestries and china, so that the eye fell, wherever it turned, upon interesting, genuine and beautiful objects. The place did not in the least give the impression of a museum ; it looked

lived in and used. Neither he nor his accomplished wife obtruded any of their treasures upon one's notice. "Yes," he would say, "that is a Romney—it is skilful of you to detect it—it belongs, of course, to that rather indeterminate period when he was making experiments and was feeling about for a style." Or he would say, "Yes, that is a pretty bowl—early eighteenth century, I believe. I picked it up cheap, but it is astonishing what people will pay for such things. I saw a couple the other day in town—they must have belonged to the same batch; but the dealer told me he wanted £600 for the pair."

It was the same thing all through the house—everything was a rarity, everything first-rate of its kind; and yet I must confess that after I had been there a day or two, I began to weary of the pageant. There was no parade of magnificence, as I have said, but if the essence of art is to conceal itself, this was not art. I became more and more aware of the contrivance, the sedulously created background, the sense of collection. It was ultimately a "fake," as they say, a very ingenious and skilful fake, and it had no reality about it, no reason for existing. It did not represent any growth or accretion of taste, it did not stand for any development of life; it was an illusion, like the palaces created in the Arabian Nights in a single moment, by the services of a Genie, a magical amassing of effects, till I grew to feel that if I returned there unawares, I should find but a field of meadow-grass, with a stream choked by water-plants, in a wild woodland, and no trace of the enchanted pleasaunce.

Then, a few weeks afterwards, I stayed with a rather impoverished squire at an old Hall in the North. The low stone building with its mullions and irregular roofs occupied three sides of a square, with a stone-flagged court, where weeds sprouted and a few garden-flowers sprawled luxuriantly. Everything was neglected, the curtains and chairs were faded by the sun, the carpets were threadbare. The old plaster ceilings were chipped and discoloured. There was a heterogeneous collection of all sorts of furniture and ornament of very different dates—some very valuable, some quite worthless. The library with its brass-netted shelves, its busts, its leather-seated chairs, its substantial tables was a room in which Jane Austen might have sat to read. There was an uncarpeted room, hung with old tapestry, hacked away ruthlessly for doorways, which was never used; in my bedroom there was a magnificent coarsely painted Jacobean fireplace, but the rest of the panelling was concealed by canvas, with an old Chinese paper hung upon it, much the worse for wear, a great dilapidated lacquered cabinet, and the cheapest modern furniture. Yet the whole house had an air of extraordinary dignity and interest, as if waves of life and cycles of taste had just deposited their wrack and passed on. The squire neither knew nor cared about his house or his furniture. "Is it indeed?" he would say if I praised a chair or a picture. "Mary, our friend says this is very fine! I am used to it, I know. I simply don't see it, though I should miss it if it were not there." He was not in the least interested in his surroundings, though I do not

think that a dealer could have tempted him to part with anything. He cared about sport and farming, he knew his tenants and was respected by them. It was a life, in fact, that he was living, and not a part that he was enacting ; and I confess that I found an interest in rambling about the old house, and in its amazing incongruity of taste, which I did not find in the exquisite creation of my much more accomplished financier.

It was true that the talk at the financier's house was much more stimulating and intellectual. Books, pictures, music, we discussed them all, and without affectation or reserve. The conversation at the old squire's was local and often tedious enough. But, again, it reflected a life and not a performance ; and just as the house represented the principle of getting what you wanted and then leaving it alone, so the financier's house represented the theory of getting what you admired, and keeping it in the pink of condition.

I came to feel what William Morris so insisted upon, that art has no sort of justification if it is an exotic thing, and only made possible by the resources of wealth. If it is to have any meaning at all, it must grow up out of need and use. Indeed artificial art is a contradiction in terms, like literary literature. Art and books which are produced for their own sake to minister to an ideal of culture are the result of a pose, when all is said and done. A book must be written and a picture painted, if either of them are to be real, because the writer and the painter have something burning within them which they wish to express. And

this tendency to imitate, to reconstruct atmosphere, to make believe that one is living in some other century, seems to me one of the most unpleasant signs of modern artificiality. In the case of buildings, for instance, there is much to be said in favour of letting things alone, there is something to be said in favour of pulling down an old building and constructing a new one, as mediæval builders did, because you believe that your own constructions are superior in every way to the old work ; but it seems to me that there is nothing whatever to be said for making an ingenious reconstruction of what the old building might once have been—and yet that is what it is the fashion to do nowadays. I visited the other day a splendid old church, with a monastic choir screened off and a parochial nave. What must an architect do but muddle up the two, in order to gain a vista ? The east window was a great perpendicular affair ; but in restoring it, the trace of an Early English window was found in the wall ; and so the perpendicular window was broken up and went to make a rockery, while a brand-new Early English window was inserted in the east wall. That seems to me to be the essence of the rococo, a bastard sort of antiquarianism, a remoulding of history. Traditional development is interesting enough, but a manufacture of tradition is surely the falsest and most affected kind of art.

The plain truth is that we are suffering nowadays from a disastrous mixture of culture and wealth. The charm of the old shabby dilapidated Hall, of which I have spoken, came partly from an absence of culture, an inability to take offence

at particular styles, an acceptance of what happened to be there, and partly from the fact that there had been no surplus income available for some generations. If there had been wealth without culture, there would have been a constant smartening up and substitution of new for old. If there had been culture as well, things would have been added for their beauty and not for their usefulness. But as it was, one really saw how people had lived and what they had wanted. There had been no calculation of effects. The estate carpenter or the neighbouring country town had supplied the requisite addition. But it was always daily life which the owners had had in view, and not artistic sensation. None of the squires had ever tried to live up to his old china ; or had felt crushed and confounded before the Venus of Milo. One of them had liked books and had bought a gentleman's library ; another had thought china pretty, and had given a commission to an Eastern merchant for some curios. But the fatal and flaccid touch of the dilettante had never fallen on the house.

And yet, when I come to consider the case of my financier, I hardly know why his collections seem to me to have something stuffy and unreal about them. He is a shrewd man of business, though you would never know it from his talk ; and he has a perfectly genuine *flair* for fine things. I do not doubt that he derives a fine sort of pleasure from his scenic background. But then I ask myself for what it is a background, and what sort of a drama is being enacted there. Now I begin to be on the scent, I think. There is no real or

homely life proceeding there at all. He is an excellent landlord, builds good houses, provides a village club, subscribes to every good object ; but he does not know anything about the people of the place, or their forbears. He has no relation with them at all.

They think him mysteriously and unaccountably kind, take the conveniences he gives them without gratitude and with a mixture of suspicion and contempt. They are quite ready to make hay while the sun shines, but they think the sun rather a fool for shining so much. They are mildly impressed by the important people who come to stay there, and they think his wife a very nice-spoken lady. But they would not dream of gossiping with him as the squire's labourers do with the squire ; they do not think that he understands, and they are quite incapable of explaining.

This may, of course, right itself in a few generations. The history of many of the lesser country houses all over the land is the history of mercantile personages who chose to become squires, and were similarly suspected and despised for a generation or two, until they became a part of local tradition.

But real life can never be lived on such lines ; and probably the factor which has tended more to uproot and dissipate settled life than anything else of late has been the increase of communication and the facilities of travelling. People ought to live mainly in one place ; and to move about much, sip a hundred local flavours, see the picturesque exteriors of innumerable communities,

sniff the atmosphere of remote human settlements, is really the one way to misunderstand life. The sentimental traveller sees the exterior of everything : he beholds salient personalities and romantic figures inhabiting novel localities and characteristic scenes. But what he does not understand is that the people whom he sees are entirely unconscious both of their own peculiarities and of the places they inhabit ; and that the real familiar current of life, its use and wont, its influences and relations, flows secretly beneath, familiar and commonplace enough to those who share it, however stimulating and unusual it may appear to the passer-by.

And so what we tend to suffer from is a dramatisation of ourselves and others, until we are tempted to look upon life as a sensational sort of fiction, a romantic affair, ruled by sentiment and perception, when it is really a very unselfconscious thing, with little artistic sensibility about it all.

One sees how in each summer that passes certain flowers—different from year to year—have a great blossoming, the reason being that the previous year was a propitious seeding-time for that particular flower, with just enough rain at the right moment to make the earth permeable and comfortable. It is much the same with modes of thought and ideas ; and at this very time, owing I fancy to the increased wealth of the Anglo-Saxon race, there seems to be a great crop of artisticism. It is not all of it very authentic—a good deal of it mere fashion—“ We think so, because other people all think so,” as the proverb says. Wealth sets free a certain number of people from drudgery,

and sends them in search of leisurely enjoyments ; but the sort of culture thus produced is not a very real culture, if it is true that art is the expression of man's joy in his work. Artisticism is rather the expression of man's joy in his idleness ; and that is not a very real joy, because it is one of the strange facts of human nature that it needs work for happiness, and yet is haunted by the instinctive belief that it is pleasanter to have no work.

This fancy is, perhaps, more characteristic of England than of America, because in England with its feudal traditions, extinct in theory long before they are extinct in fact, idleness has long been held to be a certain mark of gentility. The feudalism of England has promoted a curious barbarian survival, that field-sports and the pursuit of game are the natural occupation of the gentleman, and the persistency of this tradition side by side with an intensive system of agriculture is a very singular phenomenon indeed.

In America there seems to be a much more instinctive feeling that a man must have his work, even if work is only the amassing of more money than he can possibly need. But in any case, among the wealthier part of the community, both in England and America, there is a great deal of money set free for the extravagant purchase of pleasurable sensation ; and artisticism comes from the deliberate pursuit of emotions and sensations, as an end in themselves, and not as the natural ebullition of human energy seeking to adorn the homely surroundings of work and daily life.

The real artistic impulse is a very different thing indeed ; the artist is the man to whom beauty

is so momentous a quality, so preponderant an element in life, that the expression of it becomes the occupation of every waking hour. Consider, for instance, the sort of life that Burne-Jones lived. He began to paint at nine o'clock in the morning, and with half an hour's interval for luncheon, he painted all through the hours of daylight ; after dinner he did black-and-white work, such as designing cartoons for stained-glass windows ; and this went on month after month, and year after year, with only very brief holidays, during which indeed he still spent the morning in painting. If one looks at the lives of writers, it is much the same. Consider the feverish industry of Ruskin, working half the day at copying a fresco, using his hour of exercise to take geological notes, writing all the evening ; recall the heart-rending toil of Carlyle, the years of his great books passing like an agonised dream. It is different with poets, because *inertia*, and the slumber of the mind, as Mr. Belloc says, is the breeding soil of inspiration, and half the poet's work is done in sad or fiery reverie. But, apart from these, if one looks at the lives of great artists, whatever their medium, it is clear that they worked not less, but more than other people ; the fitful genius, who dashes off an immortal work in a few hours and thinks no more of it, is a romantic fiction ; all great work emerges out of patient failure and despondent effort. The truth is that real art is a frightfully serious business, and cannot be done in a brilliant hurry ; it must be a great strain and an apparently selfish absorption.

But the radical mistake of artisticism is to

believe that it can get the emotion without the strain, and that it can float tranquilly in the enjoyment which visits the true artist only in awful and blinding flashes of joy.

If one regards the life of the majority of human beings, one is apt to lose oneself in a sort of dreary wonder at what can be the point of it all ; it is not that most people do not achieve a sort of happiness ; it is rather that this happiness is of so poor a quality when it is compared with the dreams of poets and artists. One is forced to conclude that enjoyment, even the enjoyment of beauty, is not the end of it at all. Enjoyment seems rather added as a sort of bribe, as a scrape of jam on the dull slice of bread, to induce humanity to face experience at all. Experience indeed seems to be the end of it—experience of many sorts ; love, labour, energy, effort on the one hand ; pain, sorrow, care, humiliation, helplessness on the other. It would seem as though man were being taught at once his significance and his insignificance. He is made all-important to himself ; his consciousness is the beginning and the end of all sensations, and nothing exists for him except through that consciousness. If that is destroyed, everything in the universe comes to an end, so far as he is concerned. In early years he lives solely in that consciousness ; little by little, his imagination and his sympathy teach him that there are millions in the same case, with just as good a right as himself to exist and to claim happiness. Then his incredible insignificance dawns upon him—he is but as one flower-head in a vast field of clover ; but side by side with that persists

a sense of his own peculiar dignity and his right to glory.

But if he thinks at all, he must perceive that it is not his place in the world, his particular occupation, his work which matters. What does matter to him is that he should have a hand in the game ; and the only important thing is how he comports himself, what use he makes of his materials, what conclusion he draws, what strength and what affection he acquires. The problem is evidently exactly the same for the pauper and the millionaire ; it matters little what comforts he collects about him, what food nurtures him ; it matters very much whether he is independent of these things, and whether he sincerely believes in some further awakening.

Doubtless the reason why the chosen friends of Christ were small professional men, fishermen, labourers, tax-collectors, was because they had the full experience of life without forfeiting simplicity. Doubtless, too, the reason why Christ spoke so seriously about the palpable disadvantages of wealth, was because wealth tends to exclude men from experience, and to enable them to live in self-satisfaction. The rich tend to have life obscured ; " wealth blinds the intelligence," as the Chinese proverb says, because it hides from men their insignificance, and gives them unearned joys.

And thus the artisticism of which I speak is dangerous because it hides from men the quality of beauty, by divorcing it from life. It makes men think that beauty is a thing, when it is really a principle which runs through life ; and the moment that one thinks of beauty as a series of

sensations producible by a series of objects, that moment the nature of beauty is hidden from us, because beauty must grow outwards from an inward vitality, as the velvety cheek of the peach is evolved from its rugged core ; it cannot be applied like rouge to a faded face, to simulate health. Beauty is, indeed, the last outcome of healthy living, and cannot be the gilding of the rotten panel.

And so to end where I began with my two hosts, the old squire, careless of the dignity of his surroundings, with his life secreting a sort of homely magnificence, is nearer to the essence of life, and even to the essence of beauty, than the financier with his carefully designed background, and his armoury of artistic sensations ; because the first life, in its touch of humanity, its solidity, its sense, its kindness, is a real and vital experience, though the old man could not have put it into words, or indeed have formed any coherent perception of its significance. But, the other life, for all its intensiveness, its design, its elaboration, is an essentially sterile and artificial thing, a pageant devised to shut the world out, and to create a paradise which must be given rather than claimed. For the garden of delight is guarded by the great angel with the flaming sword, and cannot be lightly approached ; and indeed the chief use of it is that it should be seen afar off by toilers upon lonely hills, guessed at, tearfully discerned, known to be there, and that it should feed our last hope rather than to satisfy our first desire.

XV

THE NEW POETS

THERE is a dark window in a gable which looks out over my narrow slip of garden, where the almond-trees grow ; and to-day the dark window with its black casement lines had become suddenly a Japanese panel for the almond was in bloom, with its delicious pink geometrical flowers : not a flower which wins one's love, somehow, it is not homely or sweet enough for that ; but it is unapproachably pure and beautiful, with a touch of fanaticism about it—the fanaticism which comes of stainless strength—as though one woke in the dawn and found an angel in one's room : he would not quite understand one's troubles !

But when I looked lower down, there was a sweeter message still, for the mezereon was awake, with its tiny porcelain crimson flowers, and its minute leaves of bright green, budding as I think Aaron's rod must have budded, the very crust of the sprig bursting into little flames of green and red.

I thought at the sight of all this that some good fortune was about to befall me ; and so it was. When I came back, there arrived a friend to see me, whom I seldom see and much enjoy seeing. He is young, but he plays a fine part in the world ;

and he carries about with him two very fine qualities : one is a great and generous curiosity about what our writers are doing. He is the first man from whom I hear of new and beautiful work ; and he praises it royally, he murmurs its phrases, he even declaims it in his high thin voice, which wavers like a dry flame ; and what makes all this so refreshing is that his other great quality is an intensely critical spirit, which stares closely and intently at work, as through a crystalline lens.

After we had talked a little, I said to him, " Come, praise me some new writers, you herald of the dawn ! You always do that when you come to see me, and you must do it now." He smiled secretly, and drew out a slim volume from his pocket and read me some verses ; I will not be drawn into saying the name of the poet. " How do you find that ? " he said. " Oh," I said, " it is very good ; but is it the finest gold ? "

" Yes," he said, " it is that ! " And he then read me some more.

" Now," I said, " I will be frank with you. That seems to me very musical and accomplished, but it has what is to me the one unpardonable fault in poetry : it is literary ! The poet has heard and read, so much sweet and solemn verse, that his mind murmurs like a harp hung among the trees that are therein ; the winds blow into music. But I don't want that—I want a fount of song, a spring of living water." He looked a little vexed at that, and read me a few more pages. And then he went on to praise the work of two or three other writers, and added that he believed there was going to be a great outburst

of poetry after a long frost. "Well," I said, "I am sure I hope so! And if there is one thing in the world that I desire, it is that I may be able to recognise and love the new voices."

And then I told him a story of which I often think. When I was a young man, very much preoccupied with Tennyson and Omar Khayyám and Swinburne, I went to stay with an elderly banker, a friend of my family. He was a great big, stout, rubicund man, very good-natured, and he had a voice like the cry of an expiring mouse—shrill and thin. We were sitting after dinner in his huge dining-room, several of us, looking out into a wide, dusty garden, when the talk turned on books, and I suppose I praised Swinburne, for he asked me to repeat some; and I quoted the poem which says :

" And even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea."

He heard me attentively enough, and said it was pretty good; but then he said that it was nothing to Byron; and in his squeaky voice the old man quoted a quantity of Byron, whose poetry I am sorry to say I regarded as I might regard withered flowers, and worse; his eyes brimmed with tears, and they fell on to his shirt front. He said decisively that there had been no poetry since Byron—none at all; Tennyson was mere word-music, Browning was unintelligible and so forth. And I remember how, with the insolence of youth, I thought how dreadful it was that the old man should have lost all sympathy and judgment; because poetry then seemed to

me a really important matter, full of tones and values. I did not understand then, as I understand now, that it is all a question of signals and symbols, and that poetry is but, as the psalm says, what happens when one day telleth another and one night certifieth another. I know now that there can be no deceit about poetry, and that no poet can make you feel more than he feels himself, though he cannot always make you feel as much ; and that the worth of his art exists only just in so far as he can say what he feels. In fact, I thought of my old friend's mind, as I might think of a scarecrow among lonely fields—a thing absurd, ragged and left alone, while real men went about their business. I did not say it, but I thought it in my folly.

So I told my young friend that story, and I said, "I know that it does not really matter what one loves and is moved by, as long as one loves something and is moved by its beauty. But still I do not want that to happen to me ; I do not want to be like a pebble on the beach, when the water draws past it to the land. I want to feel and understand the new signals ! In the nursery," I said, "we used to anger our governess when she read us a piece of poetry, by saying to her, 'Who made it up ?' You should say, 'Who wrote it ?' she would reply. But I feel now inclined to ask, 'Who made it up ?'—and I feel, too, like the sign-painter on his rounds, who saw a new sign hung up at an inn, and said in disgust, 'That looks as if someone had been doing it himself'—your poet seems to me only a very gifted and accomplished amateur."

"Well," he said rather petulantly, "it may be

so, of course ! But I don't think that you can hope to advance, if you begin by being determined to disapprove."

"No, not that," I said. "But one knows of many cases of inferior poets, who were taken up and trumpeted abroad by well-meaning admirers, whom one sees now to have had no significance, but to be so many blind alleys in the street of art ; they led nowhere ; one had just to retrace one's steps, if one explored them. Indeed," I said, "I had rather miss a great poet than be misled by a little one."

"Ah, no," he said, "I don't feel that. I had rather be thrilled and carried away, even if I discovered afterwards that it was not really great."

"If you will freely admit that it may not be great," I said, "I am on your side. I do not mind your saying, 'This touches me, with interest and delight ; but it is not to be reckoned among the lords of the garden !' What I object to is your saying, 'This is great and eternal !' I feel that I should be able to respond to the great poet, if he flashed out among us ; but he must be great—and especially in a time when there really is a quantity of very beautiful verse. I feel myself that, perhaps, this time is one that will furnish out a very beautiful anthology. There are many people alive who have written half a dozen exquisite lyrics, when the spring and the soaring thought and the vision and the beautiful word all suddenly conspired together. But there is no wide, large tender heart at work. No, I won't even say that ! But there is no great spirit who has all that and a supreme word-power

as well. I believe that there is more poetry, more love of beauty, more emotion in the world than ever ; and a great many men and women are living their poetry, who just can't write it or sing it."

" A perverse generation seeking after a sign ! " he said rather grimly ; " and there is no sign forthcoming except the old sign, that has been there for centuries ! I don't care," he added, " about the sign of the thing. It is the quality that I want ; and these new poets, of whom I have been speaking, have got the quality. That is all I ask for."

" No," I said, " I want a great deal more than that ! Browning gave us the sense of the human heart, bewildered by all the new knowledge and yet passionately desiring. Tennyson——"

" Poor old Tennyson ! " he said.

" That is very ungracious," I said. " You are as perverse as I was about Byron, when the old banker quoted him with tears. I was going to say, and I will say it, that Tennyson, with all his faults, was a great lord of music ; and he put into words the fine homely domestic emotion of the race, the poetry of labour, order and peace. It was new and rich and splendid, and because it seems to you old-fashioned, you call it mere respectability ; but it was the marching music of the world, because he showed men that faith was enlarged and not overturned by science. These two were great, because they saw far and wide ; they knew by instinct just what the ordinary man was thinking, who yet wished his life to be set to music. These little men of yours don't

see that ! They have their moment of ecstasy, as we all have, in the blossoming orchard full of the songs of birds. And that will always and for ever give us the lyric, if the skill is there. But I want something more than that : I, you, thousands of people are feeling something, that makes the brain thrill and the heart leap—the mischief is that we don't know what it is ; and I want a great poet to come and tell us."

" Ah ! " he said, " I am afraid you want something ethical, something that satisfies the man in Tennyson who

" ' Walked between his wife and child
And now and then he gravely smiled.' "

But we have done with all that ; what we want are people who can express the fine rare unusual thoughts of highly organised creatures, and you want a poet to sing of bread-and-butter ! "

" Why, yes," I said. " I think I agree with FitzGerald that tea and bread-and-butter are the only foods worth anything—the only things one cannot do without. And it is just the things that one cannot do without that I want the new great poet to sing of. I agree with William Morris that art is the one thing we all want—the expression of man's joy in his work. And the more that art retires into fine nuances and intellectual subtleties, the more that it becomes something esoteric and mysterious, the less I care about it. When Tennyson said to the farmer's wife, ' What's the news ? ' she replied, ' Mr. Tennyson, there's only one piece of news worth telling, and that is that Christ died for all men.' Tennyson said very

grandly and simply, ' Ah, that's old news and good news and *new* news ! '—and that is exactly what I want the poets to tell us. It is a common inheritance, not a refined monopoly, that I claim."

He laughed at this, and said : " I think that's rather a mid-Victorian view. I will confute you out of the Tennyson legend. When Tennyson called Swinburne's verse ' poisonous honey, brought from France,' Swinburne retorted by speaking of the Laureate's domestic treacle. You can't have both. If you like treacle, you must not clamour for honey."

" Yes, I prefer honey," I said, " but you seem to me to be in search of what I called *literary* poetry. That is what I am afraid of. I don't want the work of a mind fed on words and valuing ideas the more that they are uncommon. I hate what is called ' strong ' poetry ; that seems to me to be generally the coarsest kind of romanticism—melodrama, in fact. I want to have in poetry what we are getting in fiction—the best sort of realism is now abjuring the heroic theory ; it has thrown over the old conventions, the felicitous coincidences, life arranged on ideal lines ; and it has gone straight to life itself, strong, full-blooded, eager life, full of mistakes and blunders, and failures and sharp disasters, and fears. Life goes shambling along like a big dog, but it has got its nose on the scent of something. It is a much more mysterious and prodigious affair than life rearranged upon romantic lines. It means something very vast indeed, though it splashes through mud and scrambles through hedges. You may laugh at what you call ethics, but that is only a

name for one of many kinds of collisions ; it is the fact that we are always colliding with something, always coming unpleasant croppers—that is the exciting thing ; and I want the poet to tell me what the obscure winged thing is that we are following ; and if he can't explain it to me, I want to be made to feel that it is worth while following. I don't say that all life is poetical material. I don't think that it is ; but there is a thing called beauty which seems to me the most maddeningly perfect thing in the world. I see it everywhere—in the dawn, in the far-off landscape with all its rolling lines of wood and field, in the faces and gestures of people, in their words and deeds. That is a clue, a golden thread, a line of scent, and I shall be more than content if I am encouraged to follow that."

" Ah ! " he said, " now I partly agree with you ; it is just that which the new men are after ; they take the pure gold of life and just coin it into word and phrase ; and it is that which I discern in them."

" Yes," I said, " but I want something a great deal bigger than that. I want to see it everywhere and in everything. I don't want to have to wall in a little space, and make it silent and beautiful and forget what is happening outside. I want a poet to tell me what it is that leaps in the eyes and beckons in the smiles of people whom I meet—people whom, often enough, I could not live with, the more's the pity—but whom I want to be friends with all the same. I want the common joys and hopes and visions to be put into music. And when I find a man, like Walt Whitman, who does show me the beauty and wonder and the

strong affections and joys of simple hearts, so that I feel sure that we are all desiring the same thing, though we cannot tell each other what it is, then I feel I am in the presence of a poet indeed."

My young friend shut up the little book which he had been holding in his hand. "Yes," he said, "that would be a great thing; but one can't get at things in that way now; we must all specialise; and if you want to follow the new aims and ideals of art, you must put aside a great deal of what is called our common humanity, and you must be content to follow a very narrow path among the stars. I do not mind speaking quite frankly. I do not think you understand what art is; it is essentially a mystery, and the artist is a sort of hermit in the world. It is not a case of 'joys in widest commonalty spread,' as Daddy Wordsworth said. That is quite a different affair; but art has got to withdraw itself, to be content to be misunderstood; and I think that you have just as much parted company with it as your old friend the banker."

"Well," I said, "we shall see. Anyhow, I will give your new poets a careful reading, and I shall be glad if I can really admire them, because indeed I don't want to be stranded on a lee shore!"

And so my friend departed; and I began to wonder whether the art of which he spoke was not, after all, as real a thing as the beauty of my almond-flower and my mezereons! If so, I should like to be able to include it and understand it; though I do not want to think that it is the end.

XVI

AT THE SIGN OF THE HOLLYHOCK

"THE Victorian era," said the triumphant young voice, gathering scorn, "made life into a suet pudding ; and the poetry of the time was like the treacle you dab over it to make it possible to get it down. Tennyson simply won't do !—the vulgarity, the commonness, the frowsiness of it all !—it is Sunday morning, the bell rings, you walk together to church, gravely smiling, with gilt-edged books, and back to boiled mutton and apple tart—screams and blushes if anyone shows an ankle getting over a stile. . . ."

"But," I said feebly, "I don't remember *many* poems of Tennyson's about domestic life—there are a few, of course."

"I didn't say they were all *about* domestic life," said my young critic, "but that is the atmosphere you are plunged in ; stuffy, persistent, buzzing conventions all about you, like these infernal flies !"

We were walking, my young friend and I, through the still glade of an old woodland, on a green deep-rutted track, the ferns glittering among the trees and the soft sun-warmed air lying motionless about us.

" Ah, but the immense range, the originality, the wonderful music of so much of it ! " I said.

" I dare say it was all that," said the young man impatiently, beating at the flies with his hands, " but just when Keats had shown the way to pure beauty and Wordsworth had glorified the simple life, Tennyson pours his stale honey out of jar after jar, and Browning deduces the infinite good-nature of God from the pages of a furniture catalogue."

" But the honey wasn't stale then," I said. " The Princess gave just the touch of romance that was wanted to female education—supposed till then to be represented by grizzled curls and spectacles ; while Browning did the same for married love—made it into adventure instead of a commercial treaty."

" Yes, but that is what I object to," said the youth ; " they didn't rebel against anything, they stuck flowers all over the dung-cart, but it went lumbering along in the same ruts."

" Oh," I said, " I grant you that Tennyson suffered very much by beginning to feel more and more responsible for pleasing second-rate people ; but the earlier poems seem to me to contain the essence of the finest and purest beauty ; and even later on—why, a new volume of Tennyson or Browning was an emotional event, not only to the second-rate minds, but to the best minds of the day, who were trying to live in ideas, desiring passionately to interpret the beauty of life, and to get away from and above conventions. Which of your pet bards is doing that ? "

" Several are doing it," said the young man,

"but only for the initiated. The mischief of Tennyson and Browning was that they popularised and vulgarised art—Art isn't inclusive—it is exclusive : it selects, it doesn't gather in."

"You mean that the villa and the vicarage have no right to any dreams of beauty?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. Tennyson and Browning are like the people who organise a *char-à-banc* service through the English Lakes. It only spoils the Lakes—it doesn't save any souls. A poet isn't a purveyor of uplift. He's a seer of hidden things :

" ' Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes in holy dread ;
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise ! ' "

We had come out of the wood now, out of the sweet aromatic scent of the undergrowth and the cool wood paths, but the grassy driftway lay before us, a green ribbon along the top of the low world : there was a big hedge to our left full of spindle wood and maple and briony, and great teasles with thorn-sprinkled leaves held up their cushioned heads, crested with purple flowers, above the undergrowth. To the left of us lay the open country with pale green pastures and red-ripe corn-fields, slope after slope ; and just beneath us the elms and orchards of a village, with its thatched and whitewashed cottages, and a buff-plastered church tower half emerging.

"Look at all that," I said—"that is what Tennyson means to me—that is the atmosphere he brings with him ! You have to be very dense if you can't see through his grave pompous knights and arch

flattering ladies—his ideas ! I would not give twopence for them ; but if ever a man could see the solid beauties of England, with the wildness just breaking like a ripple on the edge of the tamedness, as it does up here, he was the man. His philosophy was worth nothing, his imagination was worth very little ; and when he tries to make people talk, in the plays or elsewhere, you can see that he never had heard human beings talk. Browning had at least made love, while Tennyson had only held out his sceptre ! ”

“ But don’t you admit any vision—any creation, any revelation to your poets ? ” said the young man, a little disconcerted.

“ Yes, indeed,” I said ; “ when a poet like Shakespeare or a writer—shall we say like Rolland ? —is telling the secrets of the human spirit, that is a different matter altogether. But you seem to me to be looking in Tennyson for all the wrong things and to be taken in by the old-fashioned world in which he lived, which he could not help reflecting, bless him, because that was exactly what he was out to do.”

“ Oh, if you make as low a claim as that for him ! ”

“ But it isn’t a low claim at all,” I said. “ Tennyson was a great landscape-painter. He wasn’t a psychologist, and he was a very third-rate prophet. He had not the least idea what was going on, or what people were thinking or hoping. He just saw what was there—and because the world, especially when you get away from towns, is an incredibly beautiful and lovable place, the man who can put that into perfect musical language

—well, he is a great poet if he can do that. The mischief is to think of him as a sage or a moralist. Take an old thing like ‘The Palace of Art’—the wretched sophistication, the morbid repentances ; but the sharply touched thumbnail landscapes are perfection ! ”

“ But aren’t you making art into a very commonplace thing ? ”

“ Aren’t you trying to make it into a very solemn and affected thing ? The poet isn’t a priest with ineffable raptures and mysteries—if he is that, he is a mystic. My own belief is that Beauty is the great hope of the world, and a universal inheritance. A great many simple people live in the world, and do love what they see in it very much. I have talked to old men and women in the country-side who have the poetic passion, quite uncritically, of course, for sunrise and sunset, for the open field, and the dense-set wood ; and then there are a good many people who love it in a dumb half-hearted way, and can have it interpreted to them ; and the poet’s work is with these ! ”

We had now turned to go down the hill, and were exchanging the loveliness of the great sweep of the country-side, seen in delicate miniature and melting into its dim horizons, for the nearer and larger beauty of orchard and hedge-row elm, of nestling homestead and cottage garden. My young friend looked discontentedly about him.

“ To be frank,” he said, “ I think this all very dull ; think of the dead, crushed, cramped lives that all this stands for, the slow-moving obtuse

minds, the pitiful sameness, the helpless dreariness of it all."

"I don't think that is the case," I said. "It is a morbid excess of sympathy to feel that. I believe that these people have just as much interest in life, just as large a share of the big emotions, just as much happiness as highly cultured people. I should like them to have a rather wider range, of course, and I believe that with a little teaching they might be able to enjoy a good deal which they do not now consciously enjoy; but when I think of the literary group of coteries, the affectations, the envy, the exaggeration of little emotions and minute effects, I feel it better to enjoy more than you can express, than to express a great deal that you don't really enjoy."

We passed a group of slim, barelegged little girls, with baskets, in charge of an amiable-looking school-teacher, going off in quest of flowers.

"Look at that," I said; "those hearts are about as full of the wine of life as they can hold. Can't we go about the business of life as directly as that? We literary men, I think, lose our sense of proportion, and shout our Hosannas at very small parlour-tricks indeed. The little books, the handfuls of lyrics, the tiny chiselled essays, the small, rather dirty novels—it all seems a rather stuffy business. Of course, one is glad when a good, generous, beautiful book appears—something that makes one see fineness and charm where one did not suspect it, something that feeds the wholesome appetite for life and beauty; and then, too, such a book testifies to the existence of another large, perceptive, happy mind among us. That

is the way to perfection, by big strides, not by finikin gymnastics. Of course, our minds are full of littlenesses and trivialities, poor ambitions, jealous suspicions ; but that is what one wants to clear out of the way—the deft criticism that can't appreciate, the stupid criticism that can't see broad differences. I don't want to make out life to be bigger or better than it is ; but I prefer the smell of the byre to the scent of the salon. . . .”

“ But you wouldn't care to spend your winter evenings sitting in a byre,” said the young man, “ reading Aurora Leigh by the light of a stable lantern ! ”

“ No,” I said, laughing. “ I am going too far—that is the worst of argument. But I think there is more poetry to be found, let us say at the Old Vicarage at Grantchester than in rooms at Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury should be the whisky and Grantchester the seltzer, not the other way round. The poetry of the day seems to me to suffer from too much technical discussion, too much mutual admiration. You must not discuss your style before you have found your subject. Great poets have generally lived much in the open air, and have very seldom heartily admired each other's verses. If you want to have a picture of the native soil of inspiration, you should read the journal of Dorothy Wordsworth. Great poets need idleness and the open air. I admit that the Soho Restaurant and rooms in Ebury Street are very good fun, but they breed arguments and not poems. For the latter you need inertness and perhaps a touch of morbid loneliness. You and your friends are too much afraid of dullness. Do

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you remember Coleridge's letter to Dorothy Wordsworth, so anxiously expected, which, when it arrived, only contained prescriptions ? ”

My young friend laughed, a pleasant, ringing laugh. “ Yes, I think perhaps it is all a little too hectic ! But I don't see myself in a cottage here, sitting in the garden looking at the hollyhocks, or walking into Cambridge to get tobacco. I'm afraid it might end in my writing a poem like the ‘ Queen of the May,’ and where should I be then ? ”

XVII

CARLYLE'S EARLY LIFE

SOME few years ago I explored the country where Thomas Carlyle's early years were spent, not exactly as a devout worshipper, for I may frankly confess that I find much of his formal writing repellent and even infuriating. But as a psychological problem, he seems to me one of the most interesting figures of the nineteenth century. He was a mass of contradictions, and who can bring the ends of the puzzle together? Such lights and shadows, such solemn depths, such pitiful shallows! And further, as a literary artist, when it was a question of personal comment and personal observation, he is simply incomparable. His eye was microscopic, and he never forgot a detail or an effect. His pictures of people and places are some of the most beautiful things I have ever read: not good-natured, of course: etched on sulphurous metal with vitriol in some cases, and often bitterly resentful. But the whole strength of the man comes out in them—his wonderful humour, his tenderness, his humanity. That fierce interest in the movement and scent of life, that piercing into the essence of the situation; they are vignettes done by a man of genius,

full of intense quality, of emotion, of life. The *Life of Sterling* is one of the best biographies in the world ; the model of a short biography, as Boswell's Johnson is of a big one. The long passage about Coleridge seems to me one of the finest biographical episodes ever put on paper—and there, dealing with things which he had seen and perceived, the personal quality is admirable.

There can be no doubt either that Carlyle did a fine work in his day. The old feudalism had been broken down by a tepid enough sort of whiggery, which was called philosophical radicalism. It was an ungenerous, cold-blooded sort of thing. Carlyle put all his money on what was really inverted feudalism. He looked upon the democracy as a thing which wanted bullying, but was too strong to be bullied. His idea was that somehow or other the democracy should be persuaded to commit itself to an enlightened despot, who would bully them on high principles for their good. The idea is so utterly dead now, that one cannot imagine sane people holding it ; but the young and ardent spirits of the time preferred it to *laissez-faire* radicalism. What Carlyle did inspire was a belief in an aristocracy of intellect and principle, a fiery idealism, a sense that there were big things to do, well worth doing in an outspoken way. But it was a barbarous affair, because it was all really built on the idea of force and injustice, and taught that greatness need not be scrupulous or particular or kind or sympathetic. It under-valued sentiment, it over-valued brutality. There was a real touch

of brutality in Carlyle—in his ideas, certainly, and in his practice too. He had a very loving heart. His relation to his mother was one of the most beautiful things ever recorded; and he loved his wife passionately, but she was a good fighter, and had a tongue which took the skin off. As she said, there were times when living with Carlyle was like living in a mad-house. His idea of marriage was that it gave a man the right to say what he chose, and he had inherited a matchless gift of exaggeration; so that when he was angry the clouds poured out water, the air thundered, and his arrows went abroad. It is extraordinary to note how, whenever Carlyle was away from his wife, his letters became tender, charming, lover-like, but there were scenes, daily and hourly scenes, in that little house at Chelsea which are too tragic to think of; two vehement, morbid, emotional creatures, at once hard hitters and exquisitely sensitive, lashing out at each other in a blind fury.

But in spite of all this one gets, from reading the *Life and Letters* and the *Reminiscences*, the sense of a very big man indeed—a man of uncontrollable emotions, overpowering melancholy, white-hot indignation, and capable of the most desperate suffering—and not only personal and private suffering, but real grief at the hopeless admixture of cruelty and meanness and baseness in human things. It must be remembered that we know more of the private life and the inmost thoughts of Carlyle and his wife than we know of any other human beings who have ever lived, except perhaps

of Ruskin. That is a tremendous test, and Carlyle stands the test. He was a chained Titan, a man of gigantic energy of soul, imprisoned in a robust but hypochondriac frame ; and the drama would be hideous, if it was not also so great and so august.

It is not difficult to love and admire Carlyle, but it is not easy to like him. There were occasions, as Rossetti said, when the old man deserved the bastinado. I am sure one would have been frightened by him, and I think one might have detested him. There is an unpleasant mixture of the Don and the peasant in him, an almost physical aroma about him. But he somehow soars above it all, splendid and immortal, a real figure in the past, not to be obliterated.

I went to Annan first—a prim, prosperous little town, conventional and decorous. I inquired my way of a pleasant bookseller's wife ; and here I had a thrill. She appealed to a kindly, determined-looking little lady in the shop, who came to me and said, " Perhaps I can help you. Mr. Carlyle was my great-uncle." She did help me, and I went off to Ecclefechan. That is a rather grim little place, dominated by a most forbidding new kirk, a piece of nightmare Gothic. I saw the graves, in the bare churchyard, very uncompromising slabs of stone ; I saw the little house where Carlyle was born, now a museum of relics. That was full of interest. There was the old man's big black flapping hat—he had some personal vanity, I feel sure—his cigar-case, his tobacco-chopper, things of daily use. There was a melancholy photograph of Mrs. Carlyle there, taken some ten years before

her death, her beauty all gone, a lean, drawn-eyed, thin-lipped woman, the embodiment of tragic suffering.

Then I went off to Scotsbrig. And here I had my first taste of Froude's quality as a biographer. Taken as a whole, Froude's *Life of Carlyle* is a very stately and noble memorial. But Froude had a strong romantic element in him, and when he had made up his mind about a subject, he saw facts not as they were, but by the light of his own imagination. Froude was wholly incapable of deliberate distortion, but his subconscious mind was too strong for him. Scotsbrig was the farm worked by Carlyle's father, and where ultimately his mother died, to which Carlyle himself used to hurry off, in his hours of gloom, to saunter and smoke and muse and try to be idle. Froude somehow contrives to give the idea that it was a mean place, and that the life there was poverty-stricken and dingy ; and there is an unfortunate illustration in the *Life*, in which it appears as a sort of hovel among spidery trees. It is true that Carlyle's brothers worked the farm, and that his sisters did the housework, and that old Mrs. Carlyle smoked her pipe in the evenings. But it is a delightful place for all that, a jolly, substantial farmstead, prosperous and comfortable, just the place where a man of simple tastes would go for a holiday. Carlyle was petted and cockered there, never required to work, given a room to himself and abundance of good plain food ; everyone bore with his whims and made much of him. The situation is enchanting. The farm stands on the edge of a miniature glen, with a stream pouring at

the bottom over slabs of rock, the braes a steep tangle of ash-trees, beeches, and maple-thickets, and the wholesome moorland comes down to the edge of the steading. From the hills about are wide views of pleasant country, with the blue Solway beyond, and the shadowy Cumberland mountains. But there is no lack whatever either of comfort or dignity; and Froude in his desire for artistic contrast has made it into a very different kind of place from what it really is.

Another day I went to Craigenputtock, which is far away beyond Dumfries. It was a farm inherited by Mrs. Carlyle from her father, Dr. Welsh, and after their marriage, the Carlyles lived there for some years. It was here that Carlyle made himself into a writer, and formed his unique and unmistakable style. Froude gives the impression of a small comfortless house, out of the reach of humanity, in barren moorlands. But it proved a very different sort of place.

We made our way up an exquisitely beautiful valley, rising on either hand to heathery heights and bluffs. In the valley runs a big clear stream, and pleasant white farmsteads lie back from the road on either hand, embosomed in trees. We went on higher and higher, by a stony hill-track, and came out at last on the moor. It was wonderfully beautiful, as I saw it, with the heather in bloom, and with an infinite prospect of wide uplands, line after line, in the purest and sweetest air, with far-off blue hills in the distance. Even in winter and in chill winds, the place must have

an austere beauty of its own. There are some big fir-plantations on the moorland, which gather themselves together in one place, with some older forest trees beyond, just under a heathery hill. You would not think there was a house in here ; it is just at the top of the watershed, where the streams divide. By the road are two big stone gate-posts, and a rough carriage-road winds pleasantly up among the plantations gay with red-berried rowans, till one comes at last to a solid square house with farm-buildings behind, exactly like a comfortable shooting-box.

Now Mrs. Carlyle's grandfather was a considerable landowner. The Craigenputtock estate, which she thus inherited, was nearly a thousand acres of sheep-farm, with excellent shooting. Old Mr. Welsh's idea was to build something more than a farm-house ; and I cannot resist the feeling that Carlyle, in insisting on moving there, was not insensible to the pleasure of living on his own or his wife's estate. He was a laird there, a very different person from a tenant-farmer like his father.

It is lonely, no doubt ; but the house is very comfortable, far more so than some Scotch shooting lodges I have joyfully inhabited. It has two big square parlours on the ground floor, and a tiny slip of a room behind, looking on to the farm-yard. It was in this room that Carlyle wrote *Sartor Resartus*.

Here again Froude's scale is wrong. This was not perhaps the right place for a young and rather delicate wife like Mrs. Carlyle, and no doubt Carlyle's extreme fastidiousness about food made

housekeeping a little difficult. But Mrs. Carlyle, till she had a bad illness, obviously enjoyed it, except when Carlyle got a solitary fit upon him, rode or walked all day alone, in a dream of thought, spoke little at meals except to gird at the food, and scribbled in the book-room instead of talking to his wife. But even so one feels that if he could have been civil and considerate enough to sit a little with his wife, even work in the parlour while she mended his socks, she would have been perfectly content. It was Carlyle's self-absorption and utter inconsiderateness which made the misery of Craigenputtock, and not the wild moors or the solid little house. Carlyle was better in health there than at any other time of his life ; and if he had been able to make a little more money, and if he could have borne the presence of an occasional visitor, Mrs. Carlyle would not have been a discontented woman.

Lord Jeffrey, who paid them a visit there, and who loved Mrs. Carlyle with a romantic love, as most of her men-friends did, was very much annoyed to find Carlyle so selfish and imperceptive as to bury a young and lively wife there, and throw all the cooking and mending upon her ; and he told Carlyle so very plainly. But there is nothing uncomfortable or undignified about the place ; it is lonely, and it is not a house in the winter months for a morbid man. But I believe that Carlyle dramatised the situation to himself—and I am sure that Froude over-dramatised it in the wrong direction.

Anyhow one gets from Froude's book a sense of something dreary and squalid about the country

and the houses where Carlyle lived ; and there is no truth in it. The country-side is not romantic, but it is a rich prosperous region, with many fine parks and demesnes, in the lower ground ; and the moorlands beyond have a peace and a beauty of their own. They are not rocky, tragic bleak places ; they swell and undulate, those soft uplands, with green well-foliaged valleys in between.

I think the sense of struggle and privation which Froude contrives to give in his *Life of Carlyle* is overstrained. He was poorly brought up, on plain and Spartan fare ; he had to trudge to school, and he lived hardly at the University. But there were plenty of jolly boys about who were doing the same. Carlyle's family never felt the pinch of grinding poverty. Then after a brief experience of schoolmastering, he became tutor to the Bullers ; and after that, though he had always to be careful, and had no income but what he made, he lived in adequate comfort and dignity. At the Bullers' he was treated more as a distinguished friend than a tutor. He had his meals when he liked, and one of the best rooms in the house. He was always welcome, if he chose to join the circle ; his conversation was always interesting and vehement. He was allowed to say what he liked, and he mixed on terms of perfect equality with all their distinguished visitors. He was never snubbed or taken to task. Then after his marriage he lived in fair comfort, and there was always money within reach. He was proud and sparing, but he was never in any real want ; and when he went to London, he walked at once without introduction

into the best literary and fashionable society of the day. Carlyle had never, it must be confessed, to make his way at all ; he had none of the struggles with poverty and obscurity that many men of letters had to endure. He was always accepted as a man of genius, and his talk gave him the power of entering into any society he chose. He was famous early, and his holidays were often a series of visits to distinguished houses. He found something caustic and unpleasant to say about most of them, but he did not refuse invitations. Indeed he proposed himself with a sort of royal magnificence, sure of an honoured reception.

So one must revise the Carlyle legend for oneself. I do not think that the revision detracts from his greatness—indeed rather the reverse. If Froude had not been so much in love with his method, emphasising the squalid background, dwelling on the shadows, he could have represented it as a romantic triumph, as in reality it was, of intellect and personality over all social distinctions. The wonder is that Carlyle, with a perfectly natural dignity, could put aside all consciousness of his origin and surroundings ; he gave no deference, he made no apologies. The Annandale peasant, in his home-made clothes, walked with perfect self-assurance into the most distinguished companies, caustic, unembarrassed, critical. That alone proves him a large man ; and his devotion, his tenderness, his indignation, his force, his majestic certainty did the rest.

He seems to me a figure in English literary history like that of Johnson. Very few people read Johnson's writings ; everyone delights in his

splendid downright, clear, humorous talk ; and if the time comes when Carlyle's own writings are read no longer, he will survive as a great personality, a man of fire and feeling, a man, with all his grievous faults—and perhaps partly through them—made in a truly heroic mould.

XVIII

COLERIDGE

I HAVE been turning over some books about Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth—there is a perpetual interest to me in famous *groups* of people, which is far greater than the interest of solitary single figures—fine minds seem to tend to run together like quicksilver, and thus they stimulate each other, they make each other happy and confident, and the brightest sparks are struck out so. There is Cottle's delicious account of the picnic at Alfoxden, to which he and Coleridge were to contribute brandy, cheese and bread, while the frugal Wordsworth promised lettuces. The cheese was stolen by a beggar *en route*, and Coleridge dropped the brandy-bottle on the stones of the stable-yard; so they sat down to bread and lettuces and what Cottle calls Castalian wine. But they were happy enough! You get charming peeps of their talk in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals, and what is particularly delightful is to trace in those records descriptive touches of things which they saw, which passed into great poems. Thus Dorothy writes in her diary, "One only leaf upon the top of a tree—the sole remaining leaf—danced round and round like a rag

blown by the wind"—This was translated into
"Christabel":

"The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky." .

It is an excellent instance of the difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge that at this time, when they were both very poor men with small resources and no prospects, Wordsworth was living at Alfoxden, which is a large country-house in a deer-park, while Coleridge was in a tiny cottage, rented at £7 a year, in Nether Stowey village. Wordsworth always contrived to involve himself in dignity, while Coleridge was eternally undignified!

It is hard to see how Mrs. Coleridge came in, or why exactly Coleridge married her. It is clear that, whether they confessed it to themselves or not, Coleridge and Dorothy Wordsworth were really in love with each other. Cottle prints a letter of Coleridge's about Dorothy, which is a very lover-like affair, and the sweet, faithful, innocent Dorothy betrays her deep affection for Coleridge over and over again in the Journals; and indeed at a later date it is clear that Coleridge's heart was given to another member of the circle—all quite Platonic, of course, and never even avowed, but still unmistakable.

It is strange that Coleridge should have been associated with Wordsworth and Southey; for there never were two men of such vigorous moral courage, so deeply rooted in self-respect, while

poor Coleridge had so little of either. Wordsworth lived in a high mystical atmosphere of his own, like a mountain-head among flying mists. He had the natural pride of austere genius, and his touch with the world was princely in its condescension. I do not think he concerned himself much with other men; he knew very little, it is clear, of the simple peasants whom he so indefatigably praised. There is no evidence that he ever cared to visit them or talk to them; they were just *dramatis personæ*. Wordsworth's sense of mystery was much more awakened by travellers, tramps and beggars, figures striking in their solitariness or their destitution. He was so ardent a home-lover, that homelessness appealed to him as a tragical thing, while he stuffed these figures, which drifted into his view, passing from the unknown into the unknown, with his own emotions. But his instinct to avoid homely intercourse with his peasant neighbours was probably a prudent one—he would never have been able to idealise them if he had known the narrow range of their ideas, or how little self-conscious their virtue was!

If Wordsworth was absorbed in dreams—and he is not a very lovable figure—Southey was absorbed in work and family affections; and he is a truly lovable man, with his passionate griefs and his heart-rending industry. There never was a more high-minded, just and kind a man than Southey; his infinite goodness to everyone who appealed to him, young literary aspirants and the like, emerges again and again into the light. He loved his fellow-men without idealising them.

And then one sees poor Coleridge trotting and shambling beside them, with his shapeless heavily moulded face, the upper part of it fine enough, with the high brow and the large clear eye ; but the lower part of it flabby and irresolute, with the thick ever-open lips, needing, as Carlyle incisively noticed, frequent inhalations to restrain the copious saliva. It is not an exaggeration to say that it seems impossible at any moment in his career to love, admire, or respect Coleridge ! Indeed the feeling about him in his circle was evidently that of a responsible sort of compassion for the gifts which all seemed to wilt away in endless talk and unfulfilled undertakings.

In Cottle's book, an extraordinarily grotesque volume in its pompous discursiveness, Coleridge appears for ever begging, borrowing, accepting ; making endless and far-reaching plans, apologising for breaking promises, and as the opium-habit grew upon him, inventing the most portentous fictions ; and behind it all sounds a miserable undertone of remorse and self-condemnation and despair.

Coleridge thought nothing of dashing off a letter to Cottle to say that he was proposing to devote twenty years to composing an epic poem. The first ten were to be occupied in acquainting himself with the whole sum of human knowledge, the next five to composition, and the last five to correction. The next day he would shuffle out some excuses for having no copy ready for the printer, ask for a loan, and beg for a long list of household necessities.

Of course his mind was of a first-rate order ; scattered richly all about his writings are the most

acute and penetrating criticisms, subtle and suggestive sayings, fine images, great maxims. He had no touch of humour, but infinite insight.

By the time that Carlyle saw him, in his last retreat, he had got so used to thinking aloud that he seemed for ever accumulating the materials for talk, laying down principles and discussing methods, and never came to any conclusion, or indeed, in Carlyle's opinion, ever communicating any ideas. Carlyle's chapter about him in the *Life of Stirling* is one of the most matchless bits of biography in existence, but it is written with all the fierce impatience of one soliloquist condemned to be silent in the presence of another ; while it is certain that the best intellects of the day resorted to Coleridge, as a kind of oracle, not for any definite teaching, but much as one would go to see a sea-lion at the Zoo, for the pleasure of watching a great creature disporting itself with a graceful massiveness, in a liquid element of thought. There was no large purpose or significance in what he was doing, but it was magnificently and impressively done, the mind so richly stored, the intellect gliding with so oily a plunge. He certainly set a mark on the age, not by performance but by mere gigantic suggestiveness, and by giving a deep sense of the pleasure and nobleness of higher thought.

What Coleridge could not do was to execute anything, in poetry or prose. Yet his best poems show a perfectly matchless quality of thought, language and metre. In their utter originality and fineness of expression they are on the very highest level. Yet his prose was much deformed

by the slowly decaying rotundity and verbosity of the time. He never got clear of that. But if he could have worked at *Pensées*, just touching and indicating single thoughts, and not attempting any combination of them, he might have reaped a considerable harvest.

Yet the lamentable impression prevails : there is hardly a more abject scene in the annals of literature, than when good Mrs. Gillman asked him if she might not give him a fresh cup of tea in the place of his cold unfinished cup. "It's better than I deserve," mumbled the philosopher. Whether he viewed it as a species of penance that he should bewail his self-indulgence in mixed companies must be uncertain ; but such self-abasement is not inseparable from conscious weakness. De Quincey and Francis Thompson preserved a self-respect, under similar circumstances, which was almost *hauteur*. There is much to be said for repentance, and more for reformation ; but very little for the practice of public self-contempt. A man may deliberately indulge a weakness, or he may be tragically conscious of moral failure ; but there is a kernel of truth in the courageous maxim that one should be ashamed of nothing but of being ashamed.

The most unattractive thing about Coleridge is his personal relations. He does not seem to have loved or admired with any passion or fire, he was lost in self-contemplation, though he was not exactly an egotist ; when he was with friends he seems to have depended rather helplessly and childishly upon them ; when he was away from them, there is no evidence that he ever thought

much about them. He washed his hands of all responsibility with regard to his wife and children. "Coleridge's letter somewhat damped us . . ." says Dorothy Wordsworth in a melancholy entry, "it contained prescriptions." It probably contained a request that they might be made up, and forwarded to him without the bill. Doubtless in early days he had some companionableness and lightness of talk; but I imagine that when the opium once began, he was perpetually in a condition of malaise and craving, and that all he looked for was some respite from depression. The talk of later days was in itself a kind of drug-taking, an attempt to escape from realities, and to distract self-reproach.

But it is idle to censure, and idler still to speculate what Coleridge might have done if he had been in easy circumstances, and had never taken to opium. What he really suffered from was an absence of any guiding principle; his intellect was prodigious, his physical sensitiveness extreme, and his moral force almost in abeyance. The tragedy of his life is simply his character expressing itself in material terms. The contrast between his grasp of philosophical principles and his total absence of ethical effectiveness is bewildering at first sight, but in the end it only shows how entirely disconnected reason and instinct can be. Coleridge could imagine wisdom, but he could not apply it. Yet this is not the reason of his unattractiveness; he might still have been a most pathetic and appealing figure, if he had only known what it was to love. Both Wordsworth and Southey, and Charles Lamb as well, could and

did love intensely and passionately ; but it was not so with Coleridge ; all mankind was to him as figures walking in his uneasy dream, men and women that appeared, drew near, disappeared. They could sometimes charm him, or give him the power of forgetting ; but he was moving all the time under the shadow of a mind which could conceive and indicate vast designs, and yet was wholly unable to bring those designs to birth.

And thus in the picture of that eager and effective circle, knit together by great visions, beautiful loyalties and majestic hopes, Coleridge seems to be for ever hanging on the edge of the group, abstracted, indifferent, mournfully devising and desiring relief, wishing that things were otherwise, vanishing and reappearing, shirking engagements, unable to account for himself, meek, pitiable, dejected, and never once joining hands with life, or fearlessly claiming love, or even passionately offering it, an unhappy vision-haunted child, and a lost sheep from the beginning to the end.

XIX

GISSING

No writer that I know has ever depicted so closely the slow strain, the bleak monotony of life as George Gissing. Two or three of his novels have a great fascination for me, and yet I do not quite know where the fascination lies. There is very little charm about them ; he had a deep perception of certain kinds of beauty, but he seems to have kept it so deliberately and firmly out of his novels that one would hardly know he had it, if he had not written two books which are not novels at all ; neither do I think he can be called a realist exactly—I doubt if he had enough experience or patience for that—and he was not only not interested in life, but I feel he actually hated and despised it. Yet there is a hard vivid actuality about two novels of his in particular, which gives me the sense of watching the movements of some rather incomprehensible marine animals—fishes, eels, crustacea—through the glass of an aquarium. I do not know that I think his books like life, but I am sure that they are lifelike. There is something—his own mind, I suppose—which is very much *there*, very much alive.

He was a man of misfortune from first to last, almost. He was destined by temperament to be

a scholar ; he loved the Greek and Latin classics with a sort of passion ; he revelled in Greek metres, and words like choriambic, glyconic, anacrusis stood for obvious and eager realities to him, but he drifted into what can hardly even be called the literary life, so hard and unrequited was his toil. He had tragic experiences, and wandered about from lodging-house to lodging-house, forced to work in a heart-breaking manner for a bare livelihood, selling his novels for very small sums, and yet always doing his best in a fastidious way. He would begin a book, write perhaps a third of it, destroy it in a fit of disgust and begin again. He often had to part with precious books, he was often in sight of starvation ; he had hardly any friends, save one or two of scholarly instincts, and there can hardly have been any circumstances of distress and sorrow which he had not to face. But exquisitely sensitive as he was, he had a tough fibre about him. He worked incessantly in a fury of concentration ; and his life produced in him a pessimism and a scorn of life which was strong in disdain, not in the least rueful or self-pitying, but yet incomplete, because so much of life was entirely hidden from him ; and thus it was not a fruitful or a reasoned pessimism, because it was based on solitary and sordid data. He seems to me indeed like a finely tempered blade held relentlessly to a coarse sort of grindstone. He needed sunshine and liberty and leisure to develop the richer part of his nature ; and he did not attain to this till it was too late. His health was weak, and weakened by his hard life ; just at the end he had a little taste of happy companion-

ship and ease and even fame. But he died prematurely and rather suddenly, having hardly reached middle age. I saw him once, a slim handsome figure, a finely cut face with abundant hair brushed back from his brow; but with something both remote and repressed about him. He made a deep impression on me, as a man on whom suffering had set a heavy mark, at once claiming and rejecting sympathy, dignified, aloof, unapproachable; as intensely refined and passionately romantic, yet grimly determined to look ugly facts in the face.

He did a great deal of very sound work. But the books which stand out, in my belief, from all the rest are *The Whirlpool* and *New Grub Street*.

In *The Whirlpool* you are introduced to a curious suburban circle, with a culture and a fashion of its own, very second-rate and rather pretentious. The plot is obscure, abounding in hints and innuendoes. But the real interest of the book is in the temperament of the heroine, Alma: she is the daughter of a financier who comes to irretrievable ruin and kills himself. Alma is brought up in wealth and attains to some skill as a violinist. She is of a neurotic and artistic type, not really interested in art, fitful, coveting applause, pretentious, affected, with great personal beauty and with a subtle charm. She marries a man who has lived recklessly in his youth, but has settled down to rather quiet and scholarly ways. They go to live in the depth of the country, but Alma is bored to death there, and they eventually drift up to London, where Alma makes her début as a

violinist, gets into difficulties, owing to her passion for recognition, breaks down in health and dies at last of an overdose of some sleeping-draught.

The relentless analysis and presentment of Alma's character is the triumph of the book ; her suspicions, her thirst for recognition, her desire to shine, her entire incapacity for making any sort of life for herself, except under the immediate stimulus of admiration and praise, are all developed with extraordinary skill. It is by far the most ruthless and exact portrayal that I know of an essentially shallow nature, obsessed by artistic and social ambitions, and without any real interest in artistic processes or artistic expression. It is appalling in its truth and fidelity, and still more in the way in which, without any narrative analysis, every incident and scene in which Alma appears is subordinated to her one desire to make an immediate and a commanding impression. In all that she does, says, dreams of, she can only see herself as the centre of a group ; and she lives joyfully among inferior people as long as she feels her own superiority. The book is dreary and tragic rather than pathetic, because Alma conciliates neither sympathy nor even compassion. She is just a soulless creature, with one over-mastering passion, to whom nothing can be explained, hardly even communicated. She just goes on her way, giving nothing, taking everything.

New Grub Street is a fuller and more varied book. Here there are two extremely interesting figures, into one of which much autobiographical experience

has obviously passed. Reardon is a shy, scholarly, creative man, who writes a promising novel, marries a pretty, ambitious girl, settles down to literature and finds his powers fail him. Reardon confronted with poverty, with a disappointed wife, forcing himself in miserable health and hopeless depression to write book after book, each of which is worse than the last, is a tragic figure. But even more tragic is the veteran *littérateur*, Alfred Yule, who has tried his hand at every sort of writing, deeply ambitious, with encyclopædic knowledge of the dullest kind, embittered, irritable. He has married beneath him, and lives in poverty and insignificance, full of self-pity, acrimony and disgust, toiling incessantly and gigantically, but drifting more and more out of the literary current of the time. There are scenes of extraordinary vigour, when Alfred Yule tyrannises over a set of shabby and inefficient literary men, makes mirthless academic jokes, and pours out the vials of his disdain upon all the writers of the day.

In contrast to these two figures, both of whom fail sordidly and ignobly, is a young journalist, Milvain, who through supple cleverness and adaptability rises into prominence.

The book is largely concerned with money, and brings the seamy side of professional literature before the eye with a ghastly exactness. I believe it to be by far the greatest of Gissing's books, because he here really drew entirely on his own experience, and never passed outside of it. It seems to me that he is never very successful in portraying the social life of the drawing-room

and the dining-room. I doubt if he ever had much opportunity of observing it. But when it comes to Reardon struggling in solitude, after sleepless nights and long ill-health, with his books, or Yule grumbling and scowling at his dinner-table, or scarifying his fellow-authors, or projecting uninteresting literary ventures, then one does unmistakably feel oneself in a real atmosphere throbbing with life and actuality.

But over both the books broods the shadow of fatalism, the tragedy of weak and ambitious natures hemmed in by insuperable circumstance, and mercilessly relegated by slow degrees to the abyss. And I think that the strength of the books lies in their economy of effect. Gissing very seldom employs great or sensational catastrophes to affect character. The books are mostly concerned with the gradual deterioration which takes place under a slow and sordid strain. There is thus very little that is hopeful or comforting about them; for he seems possessed with the desire to hunt out of the field all characters with a slender and frail charm, the idealists who have no practical hold on life, the lovers who cannot prevail, all the tender and sensitive natures for whom the world is too strong. It is as though he recounted the sad fate of flowers which might have bloomed sweetly in a sheltered and tender garden, but which cannot hold their own when transplanted into the rank competition of wild and waste. And thus the books give one the sense that the author has put his mind rather than his heart into them, and traces the extinction of weakness rather than its redemption. There were,

however, two books into which he put his heart. One a little book of travel, *By the Ionian Sea*, is full of a delicate charm of old traditions and sweet association ; the other a book called *The Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the diary of a man of letters, who retires, on an unexpected legacy, to a cottage in the country, and lives in tired and grateful serenity. There is much that is beautiful about the book, in its reverie and calm—but it is essentially dreamlike, a vision such as a swimmer in difficult surges might frame of the weary relief, of the security of the shore. He abandoned for once the mood of grim tension, and luxuriates in a fantasy of hope, like a tired-out man stretching his limbs in a clean and fragrant bed at the close of a squalid day of drudgery.

The chief artistic claim, then, that Gissing's work makes upon the mind is through these two qualities—their restraint and their tenacity. Gissing never yields to any temptation to be descriptive or emotional or ornamental. I know no books so entirely stern and business-like. No speaker in them is ever glowing and enthusiastic. He put all the convention of romance and sentiment utterly away from him. And though I think that they are ultimately romantic rather than realistic, because the essence of romance is emphasis, and Gissing in all his books emphasised the coldness and bleakness of life, they do not seem to me to have any weakness or fluidity about their treatment. But at the same time their pessimism is that of a man who felt his own weakness and yet determined that he would not attempt to make the sort of conditions he had to face in any way con-

ciliatory or pathetic or emotional. He is not strong enough to hope, but he is strong enough not to despair. He hates life, he fears it ; but he does not avert his eyes from it, and passes on in loathing, but undismayed.

XX
GEORGE MACDONALD

(1)

THERE is a beautiful image in George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, when the hero, taking refuge for the night in a cavern in the depths of the enchanted forest, discerns first that the walls of the cave, among the trailing and festooning creepers, are of pure white marble, half translucent ; and next that what at first appeared to him to be a whiteness in one of the great blocks, with an accidental likeness to a human form, is indeed a prisoned shape of some kind, statue or living woman.

The big *Life of George MacDonald*, which I looked forward to with keen interest, seemed to me when I had finished reading it to be rather of the same kind—a cave, with a living form prisoned and concealed. I would not be ungenerous to a laborious and dutiful book, but there is a mistiness about it. George MacDonald himself, his devoted wife, his numerous children, his troops of friends—no one of them seems to emerge or stand out from the haze. It is all like a dance of shepherds and nymphs in a mist.

At one time George MacDonald appears as an ordained minister ; then he is a layman again ;

one does not quite know how or why. He marries ; but his faithful and unselfish wife, with her passionate joy in self-sacrifice, except for a few glimpses in family letters, is a shadowy figure. Beautiful and accomplished children are born, grow up, act plays and alas, die—but they are all indistinct. How did they all contrive to live? One does not know ; the only fact that is clear is that he was often at his last shilling. Then he becomes suddenly famous with a novel, but still there is no money available. All the time the family is constantly moving, and living sometimes in beautiful and picturesque houses. There are lecturing tours in America, more and more books. Then they are found in a large house at Bordighera, the Casa Coraggio, provided by friends, with great gatherings of adherents and disciples and constant entertainments of music and tableaux. Then, as inexplicably, he falls into complete apathy and a five years' silence, and fades out of the world as mysteriously as he entered it.

What is one to make of it all? There is a good deal of detail ; but yet no picture is formed. One can realise his majestic and beautiful presence, and even his childlike fondness for bright and fantastic clothes, gold buttons, tartans, red cloaks. But one gets no idea of his talk—it seems formless and unemphatic. The quoted poems are amateurish ; the letters are disappointing, with an occasional splendid touch of realism, as when he compares the trembling of his house in the great earthquake at Bordighera to the shuddering skin of a horse determined to get rid of a gad-fly.

Yet, behind the mist, the book has a certain

life of its own, or rather one feels sure that it hides a rather intense family life and the movement of an attached and serious but perhaps rather affected coterie. One gets a vague impression that George MacDonald himself was a great, handsome child-like creature, of rather an appealing type, un-businesslike and absent-minded, emotional and sensitive, but yet with a considerable toughness of endurance and a power of banishing sadness and anxiety ; a magnified child, in fact, with one supreme gift, the gift of pure imagination, and a rich and glowing style, with no vagueness at all about the word-pictures he could draw.

He was always, of course, a moralist, and much of a poet ; but except in a few fortunate lyrics, not a faultless craftsman ; and what seems to have been the mistake of his life is that he drifted from mood to mood, trusting too much to vague inspiration and never facing a situation clearly, till at last, with his magnificent physical appearance, his overflowing kindness, his occasional sternness, he fell before a temptation to which other mystical men have yielded, of allowing himself to be considered a prophet, a doom which he shared with Ruskin and Carlyle and Wordsworth and other great men who found it not unpleasant to be called Rabbi.

To be an effective prophet a man's chief concern must be with other men ; he must penetrate and understand and truly sympathise with the secrets of the heart, even when they are not good or happy secrets. But the prophetic mood is always at variance with the artistic mood, and the best artists—who are ultimately the best prophets—

have escaped from the dangers of the prophetic rôle partly by a sense of humour, partly by a great dislike of solemnity, but most of all by a love and admiration of life so strong that they cannot bear to tamper with it, as the prophet is too apt to do. Carlyle was not a prophet when he wrote the *Life of Stirling* or the *Reminiscences* ; and Ruskin when he wrote *Præterita* had come out dizzy and smoke-stained from the other end of the tunnel ; and Wordsworth was not a prophet until long after he had ceased to be able to write poetry at all.

But George MacDonald was not interested in the human heart, only with some parts and aspects of it. He was perhaps too guileless and innocent. His heart was with Prospero and not with Falstaff. He loved the sky and the night, the woodland and the country-side with a passion which he never really gave to human beings. In his most intimate letters there is always a sense of something impersonal. As he wrote to one of his daughters, " I love you far more because you are God's child than because you are mine." And what he appears from his letters to have been in search of was a God whom he was able to trust, but whom he never seemed quite certain of being able to love. In his talk and informal sermons he seemed to have allowed himself to say more than he knew but never more than he hoped.

Yet somehow in spite of these drawbacks, which I have not mentioned with any depreciation, but because his was a complex nature much tried both by circumstances and temperament, there does survive an impression of great moral beauty, of good-will and patience, of guilelessness and purity

which is a background for the real genius of the man.

For that is after all what interests us, not the broad simple qualities which he shared with many unrecorded men, but the particular gift of beauty, the enlightening interpretation of life which he had to give to the world. His intellectual outfit was not great ; as a speaker he must have had a touch of attractive eloquence, and a power of conveying a direct sense of his goodness and trustfulness. His poetry is often moving but as often inartistic and even flat. His novels have observation, naturalness, flashes of humour, but there is little characterisation and they are always the work of a moralist. What then was the one pre-eminent gift ? No lover of George MacDonald can doubt that it is the fairy-tale. He had the same genius for that as Hans Andersen ; and if one reads Hans Andersen's life one sees at every turn the same traits as one sees in George MacDonald—a childlike affection, a touch of personal vanity and fondness for fine clothes, a willingness to accept kindnesses, an entire incapacity for dealing with the world ; though in addition to these, Hans Andersen had faults and deficiencies from which George MacDonald was wholly free.

(2)

It cannot be said that much of MacDonald's work has achieved or will achieve permanence. There is a fatal inequality about it. The novels are good stories, with humour and freshly drawn detail ; but they are long, and instead of indicating

or suggesting ethical problems to readers who demand ethics in a novel (forgetting how very incidentally they occur in real life) they make the mistake of indulging in lengthy moralising. It was indeed the unhappy delusion of MacDonald, at least in later years, that he had some direct prophetic message to deliver and that religion needed to be systematised and built up by argument. As a matter of fact, MacDonald had a profound intuition into the warring instincts out of which intellectual minds weave metaphysical webs of thought ; and while he was content to embody truth in a tale, as in the Gospel itself, he could flash beauty into a truth which philosophically stated appears both dull and obvious, leave his hearers' minds wondering and expecting, and reveal the outline of some large spiritual adventure ahead, which is just what so many sermons fail to do.

I can hardly imagine a tale more likely to awaken a thirst for spiritual adventure than *Phantastes*. The sad thing is that in unimaginative hands the spiritual elements of life are so apt to be presented to childish minds as something meek and dull instead of something both gay and dangerous, and the fires of morality are too often quenched under the ashes not so much of reproof as of sordid materialism.

In *Phantastes*, the hero Anodos finds himself in fairyland, a great forest, painted with extraordinary charm. Indeed, one can unhesitatingly infer from MacDonald's own words in certain of his letters that he was one of those to whom places appealed more than people, and whose sense of beauty and strangeness was more fed by nature

than by humanity. The silent loveliness of the great wood which by day seemed plunged in sleep waiting for nightfall to awaken it into activity and energy is wonderfully depicted. And all this is achieved by little vivid touches and by no length of description.

As he walks in the freshness of the morning the sense of something unfriendly, hostile, even sinister, grows upon him ; and at a cottage where he stops to rest he learns that certain of the trees (the Ash and the Alder in chief) have an enmity to human life, while the Oak and Beech and others are friendly protectors. As nightfall comes on and when the moon rises he becomes aware that he is being dogged, and he finally has a hideous vision of the Ash, the shadow of whose skeleton claw, raised to seize him, is cast on a space of grass in the moonlit glade. He is saved by the intervention of the Beech, a beautiful silent woman ; and a little later in a grotto of rough alabaster he discerns the shape, imprisoned in one of the blocks, of a White Lady, whom he frees by toil and song, but who flies from him.

Later again, in an access of dreamful joy, he meets what appears to be the White Lady, who leads him with love and delight to her cave, only to awaken on the morrow and find that he has been deluded by the Alder, with her cankered spirit and hollow heart.

He throws off the misery of it ; but not long after he enters, though solemnly warned against it, the house of an old woman supposed to be the descendant of Ogres. There, opening a door into what he at first thinks to be a dark cupboard,

but suddenly realises to be a long passage leading out into the night, he is assailed by a runner, who comes down the passage at full speed, and passes him. But turning round he sees lying at his feet a shadow of deep blackness.

This is the crisis of the book ; the rest is of the nature of a purgation by which the shadow is slowly cleansed away. But here, by an artistic mistake and to the great detriment of the story, MacDonald deserts the forest, and we have a fairy palace, and a knightly apprenticeship, the slaying of giants and dragons, and if the truth must be told, a good deal too much poetry, both sung and recited, containing a couple of exquisite lyrics, but much of it of so poor a quality that it might be mistaken for a conscientious translation from the German. I do not say that there are not other beautiful episodes in the book, particularly the last, where in a great forest shrine, among white-robed worshippers, he witnesses a human sacrifice, and tears a frightful idol from its throne ; out of the cavity thus made leaps a huge, fierce wolf-like creature, in throttling which he loses his life, only to waken again in his old home, from which he had been missing many days.

The book, indeed, is rich in vivid inconsequent episodes, romantic, humorous, solemn and bizarre ; but artistically it reveals the wilfulness and child-like restlessness of MacDonald's mind. He began with a perfect setting for his story, in which all his genius could display itself ; but just when one is deeply concerned about the trees, their influences and powers, and the fate of Anodos, he is whisked away into a much more commonplace sort of

romantic setting. One cannot help mourning over this, for I know no book at all in which the outer beauty and the inner menace of the woodland is more profoundly caught and depicted.

In any case, with all its patent faults, the book is rich in symbols and hints ; and what makes these so poignant is that the fine narrative—for the style is wonderfully delicate and flexible—never gives the sense, as allegories like *Agathos* unfortunately do, of the story being, like the clouds in Cowper's hymn, big with mercy and shortly about to break in blessings mixed with moral principles upon the anxious pilgrim's head. That is where the childlike eagerness of MacDonald comes in, that he is desperately and exclusively interested in the story, and tells it breathless and open-eyed, with marvellous reality of visualisation, and also, at least in the inspired part of the book, with entire avoidance of the sentimental and pietistic elements, which destroy so many instructive stories. The book has obvious faults ; it drops far too often, like *Silas Wegg*, into very indifferent verses, it breaks the glowing narrative by imported stories, it is loose in scheme, desultory in form ; but it has the indefinable touch of genius, and the ardent and exquisite atmosphere of beauty and rightness, which much artistic work, more deliberate and more elaborate, often contrives to miss. It is not, to use a metaphor, wholly fused, but it has felt the intensest fire of art.

It was read to us as children by my mother, with incredible boldness, nearly sixty years ago. But I have never ceased to read it at intervals ; and every time I have read it, I have admired

more and more its unearthly charm, and found its perception of the great issues of life more and more profound and noble.

“Thus I,” says Anodos, on the last page of the book, “who set out to find my Ideal, came back rejoicing that I had lost my Shadow.” That is a wise and patient, and by no means a tame, conclusion. It reminds us of the insight with which Bunyan in the *Pilgrim's Progress* represented Christian as finding a joyful freedom in the valley of Humiliation, which he knew nowhere else upon his pilgrimage. The truth is that most of us discover in after life that our youthful ideal was much lacking in nobility and generosity, and much alloyed by second-rate ambitions and ugly desires intermingled. But to lose the shadow of our failures is to become as the child again to whom the Kingdom is revealed.

Did George MacDonald himself lose the shadow? I hardly know. To himself he remains Anodos, one of those who went astray in the wilderness out of the way. But at all events he never turned his back either upon life or experience, and he remains for ever one of those happy natures who never suffer the disastrous doom of being able precisely to formulate their conclusions. For to make up your mind about life is probably the shortest way to missing the meaning of it.

XXI

LORD RAYLEIGH

MEMORY is a very inconsequent and fantastic thing ; my own memory persists in maintaining, in spite of all reason or probability, that my first remembered sight of Lord Rayleigh was in the court of King's, in my undergraduate days, a slender figure with fly-away reddish whiskers linked together by a moustache, his arms loaded with large tubes of cartridge-paper ! He was at that time a Professor, living during the Cambridge terms in a villa near the station, and he was interested, I believe, in problems of acoustic resonance ; but what the tubes were for, or why he should have been carrying them in the court of King's, I cannot tell. The only point about the vision is that it is so strange that I hardly see how I could have invented it !

My uncle, Henry Sidgwick, and Lord Rayleigh had married two sisters of Lord Balfour, and this no doubt accounts for my early acquaintance. I used to go to dine at Salisbury Villas, in a room adorned, if I remember rightly, with small portraits of ancestral personages. The Rayleighs were abundantly kind to me. I entertained a deferential reverence for a man who had been senior wrangler, and who presented in himself the

not very usual combination of a Professor and an hereditary peer. His learning disconcerted me even more than his peerage. Senior Dons in those days were people to be approached with caution. They might prove gracious and paternal, but they might also be found to be incredibly remote, both in mind and outer aspect, harsh in judgment, impatient of tentative civility, even fatuously unconscious of the presence of anything so negligible as an undergraduate.

But no one could have found Lord Rayleigh formidable for long. He was one of the most modest, simple and accessible of men. Indeed there was a touch of reassuring shyness about him, which made one feel that he welcomed friendly approaches. He was not a copious talker and had a certain abstractedness about him at times as if abstruse problems were running in his head. Altogether a distinct and impressive figure, in the sense that he seemed to stand for something of hidden importance; and withal a tranquil and cordial man, whose abundant titles to respect and honour could never have been inferred from his demeanour or speech.

Soon after this I was invited to Terling, his country-house, and was often there in those early years, sometimes with a party, but oftener with just the family circle. The boys were children, not yet at school; Willy, the youngest, afterwards to be in my house at Eton, was a smiling baby, brought in for inspection on state occasions, in a white frock adorned with bows of ribbon.

It was a house of much freedom and independence—a temple of industrious peace. I used to

ride, perhaps with one of the boys on a pony, go out to shoot rabbits with the keeper, who confided to me one day that it was a pity from the point of view of sport that his Lordship spent the entire day in his "lavatory." There would be strolls and walks, much sitting out in summer under the shade of big trees, endless airy talk and argument. But there was no compulsion on anyone to do anything in particular.

Terling stands in what may be called a rather dull Essex landscape, only saved from being commonplace by an abundance of fine trees. There was no pompous entrance to the domain; you drove in at an iron gate with no lodge; on your right was visible the village, and the church, standing on a sort of platform or terrace, with a flight of steps on to the drive; below this was a mill-pool, with a few broken fragments of a mill, through which the Strutt family had first risen to prosperity.

The house fronted you on the left, a large, square solid mansion of yellow brick with stone facings, and on each side, running out at a very obtuse angle, two long wings, with arches and windows. The wing to the left contained the domestic offices, that to the right the laboratories.

You entered a portico, and found yourself in a large classical hall, which occupied the whole centre of the house. It was rather a gloomy sepulchral place by day, painted dark and lighted only by windows in the east front. A gallery of metal leading to bedrooms ran round it, and the Parthenon frieze of moulded plaster with a blue background supplied the cornice. It was floored

with parquetry, contained a grand piano, and was a very comfortable-looking place in the evening.

On the left was a big dining-room, with many portraits ; and a pleasant little point that I remember was that on days of summer, when the high windows were open, the swallows used to fly into the room at breakfast and luncheon, circle about under the ceiling, and whisk out again. Another little detail about the room that I remember was the cluster of toasting-forks which hung on each side of the fire, so that anyone could make toast for himself at will.

Then in front of you was a big library, the most used room of the house, at the end of which stood Lady Rayleigh's fine organ, blown by water. There was a drawing-room beyond, to the right, and another long drawing-room on the right of the hall ; but the two latter rooms were only used if there was a big party.

The library opened by a French window on to a great bright expanse of flower-beds, and gravel walks. To the left a large kitchen garden ; to the right a conservatory, and some fine elm trees, with a lake beyond.

Beyond lay the park, which seems to me to have been of great extent. A stream came down it, which fed the lake, and passed on to the mill-pool. But the low level Essex contours provided no very picturesque background. The only distinction of the park, as I have said before, was the fine trees, ashes, oaks, elms, both stately and of well-designed form. It was not very clear where the park melted into farm-land. But I seem to remember a very quaint manor-house called

Toppingoe, a brick Tudor building with crow-stepped battlements, and huge spruces and pines about it, which was a part of the property. There were marshy fields in places, with rush-girdled pools, all supplying an abundance of pleasant vignettes, which linger in my memory still.

Lord Rayleigh, when I first went there, had not begun his dairy business, which prospered so much in his brother's hands. The house was comfortable enough, but it all looked as if it had taken shape in pre-Victorian days, and stopped there. I remember nothing in the way of elaborate furniture or hangings ; all was solid and simple, with perhaps a touch of rather grateful bleakness.

One saw very little of Lord Rayleigh except at meals ; but then he never seemed tired or pre-occupied, neither did he ever talk anything that could be called shop. I do not recollect that he gave the impression of literary culture ; he was not a bookish man. But he had a wide and accurate knowledge of affairs, an interest in personalities, and a deep and perennial flow of humour. It was delightful to see him hear or tell an amusing story ; his whole face lit up in concentrated mirth ; his very limbs took their share of the jest, and quiveringly emphasised his comfortable giggle. He did not, as I remember, start topics of talk, but there were few subjects to which he did not contribute something shrewd and spontaneous. He was always himself—he did not quote other people's opinions, and his conclusions were his own.

His children always seemed on easy terms with him. He was not an assertive parent, nor did he

ever parade the authority which he undoubtedly possessed.

A little scene comes before my mind. It is a winter evening, between tea and dinner. The tall library windows, the curtains not yet drawn, look out on to a moonlit snow-sprinkled expanse, and a mist rises from the clayey park-lands.

One of the boys is reading by the fire, in his father's pet arm-chair. Lord Rayleigh comes in, selects a paper from the table, and then standing behind the chair, with his hands on the boy's shoulders, smilingly ejects him, and snuggles down, one knee crossed over the other.

The ejected boy goes to the window and looks out at the moonlit mist. Without turning round, he says :

"What is the cause of a lunar halo ?"

The paper rustles.

"Refraction, I suppose ; something to do with ice-crystals."

Silence for a moment.

"That's not a very satisfactory answer."

Lord Rayleigh laughs. "No, I don't really know much about it."

"Oh, I thought it was rather a specialty of yours !"

The boy turns and goes out of the room.

Lord Rayleigh glances across the hearth-rug at me, also ensconced in a chair with a book, and gives a perceptible wink : "The younger generation !" he says.

Sometimes he would take one into his laboratory. I remember big, gaunt bare rooms, piled up with crates and apparatus. In the middle of

the largest room, a curious congeries of tubes and retorts, with clay moulded round the joints—an ugly homely-looking affair.

“ I am still trying to weigh hydrogen, you see.”

“ I think,” say I, “ that you were doing that when I was last here—are you any nearer to getting a result ? ”

“ How long ago was that ?—two years ?—No, I think I am rather farther off. One realises the imperfections of one’s apparatus more and more.”

There is a beautiful little picture of Lord Rayleigh in his laboratory by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, facing a strong light, the rest of the room shrouded in darkness, in his shirt sleeves, handling a glass retort. That picture gives the most exact impression of him, as I knew him, that I have ever seen—the fine curve of the brow, the kindly rather wearied eyes, the shapely hands with delicately pointed fingers ; it brings him before me exactly as he was.

Lord Rayleigh dressed carelessly, as a busy man with no thought of adornment might. But I always felt that there was an indefinable air of distinction about him ; partly his hands and feet, which were small and finely moulded—partly the tranquil unchallenging air, and the calm intelligence of his face. He always looked a happy man ; and if there was a touch of shyness about his demeanour, there was no awkwardness or self-consciousness. He was not gregarious, nor naturally sociable. For his pleasure, he migrated to solitude. He avoided functions ; and I remember being present when he received a letter from

Lord Salisbury, his uncle by marriage, asking him as a personal favour to become Lord Lieutenant, and the humorous regret with which he said, "I don't see how I can back out. Lord Salisbury says that Essex is not rich in appropriate peers."

His appearance, I think, changed somewhat in later years. At one time I seem to remember him with a beard ; then beards and whiskers gave place to a close-clipped moustache ; but on the whole he changed very little. He looked elderly when he was young, and he looked elderly when he was old. Considering how delicate a man he was, and how precarious for many years his life seemed to be, he showed hardly any sign of weakness or sickliness. His face never wore a glow of health, but I do not remember his ever looking fatigued ; and when in later life he had functions of a public kind to discharge, he went through them with the same quiet and unembarrassed air.

There have been, no doubt, both scholarly and scientific peers, though the aim of the peerage has never been the endowment of research. Lord Rayleigh, though a large landowner, never took any vivid interest in the details of his estate. He lived the life of a retired student and investigator ; but the charm which he exercised, which was very great, came from his complete freedom from the importance and pomposity which is often the shadow of greatness, whether inherited or earned. I have known eminent students and scientists who were deeply sensitive about recognition and homage, determined, as Carlyle said of Wordsworth, to collect their bits of tribute. Lord Rayleigh had no interest in tributes. There was a little glazed

case in one of the rooms at Terling, containing miniatures and family mementoes : " What is that ? " said an inquisitive woman, pointing to an enamelled cross attached to a ribbon. " The Order of Merit," said Lord Rayleigh " a barbarous object ! " He took it up and surveyed it with dispassionate curiosity.

What he thought about inner and more personal problems and beliefs I never knew. He read family prayers, he was a devout worshipper in the parish church ; he did not encourage rash speculation on religious matters, though to what extent he subjected his religion to his intelligence I never divined. In conduct, he had a touch of puritanism, not of the petty and interfering kind, but rather a deep aversion to anything disorderly, self-indulgent, or coarse. I imagine that his ultimate principles were stern in matters of duty, but he was tolerant and peaceable, and could never have been instant out of season. His family affections were strong and gentle, but one did not feel him to be a man who was closely linked to humanity, nor one who took any curious pleasure in human inconsistencies and foibles. He dwelt apart, and it was duty rather than companionableness that brought him into contact with his fellow-men. He had the kindliness and simplicity of the sage, without the smallest shadow of condescension in his pure and generous nature ; but to know him was to feel the essential weakness of the democratic creed, when it either rules out or professes to embrace one whose aristocracy of birth was as nothing compared to his scientific genius, and the perfect disinterestedness of his lofty and stainless character.

XXII

REGINALD HOWE

THE case of my friend, Reginald Howe (I will call him), was a strange one, and I have often puzzled over it. I only met him once in my life, but I know more about him through his letters than I have known of some of my most familiar friends. He wrote to me about something I had written, and we drifted into correspondence. He told me much about himself—he was singularly frank and outspoken in his letters, of which I have a large bundle in his finely shaped interesting hand. Not that he was egotistical ; he did not write, nor indeed did he think, much about himself ; what he told me was in reply to direct questions, because he interested me extremely, and I catechised him closely. How exactly he lived, I hardly know. He had a little income of his own, and he made a little more by writing, but his needs were of the simplest. He drifted about like a ghost ; there were half a dozen places, an inn or two and some lodgings, where he was at home. There was a farm-house in the Lakes and another in Devonshire, an inn in the Cotswolds, another in the New Forest, a lodging on the Sussex coast and another lodging in Dorsetshire, in a lonely village : these I knew of for certain and I dare say there were others.

He had no worldly possessions except a few books, a Shelley, a Wordsworth, a Homer, a Greek Anthology—half a dozen in all—which he carried about with him, read many times, mused and meditated over. He used to buy a few cheap books, and throw them away when he had finished them. He ate the simplest food, never used either tobacco or alcohol, spent much of his time in long walks in the open air. He was the most solitary of beings, and yet he had a great ease and charm of talk, and was not in the least shy, to all appearances. He had been educated at some local grammar school in Devonshire as a day-boy. I believe that his mother had lived there as a widow, and I never heard of any other relations. He had been for a short time at Oxford, but when his mother died, he went down without taking a degree, and it was then that his wandering life began. We corresponded at first about books. He was a delicate and fastidious critic. “I often think,” he wrote to me, “that people make a most unnecessary and unaccountable fuss about books. To me they are only interesting as little sparks struck off by men’s minds, and the best books in the world seem to me to lag very far behind the essence of the human spirit. Books give me faint glimpses of fine minds—they are like a momentary peep through a narrow chink into a lighted chamber, and the misery of books is not that they tell so much but that they hint so little. Perhaps they give me, at their very best, the most intimate perception one can get of the hidden and mysterious thing, the soul of man. But the longer I live the more I feel how utterly concealed and secret

the spirit is. A human being seems to me like a beautiful child confined in a castle dungeon, among great walls and winding passages and labyrinthine rooms. It cannot get out, it cannot make its presence known. The body, with its clumsy machinery, habits, inheritances, associations, conventions, desires, passions, blocks the way. Sometimes, very rarely, you see a face at a darkened window and a hand waved—but to get near the imprisoned child, to look in its eyes, to take its hand seems almost impossible, and apart from all the other obstacles, it is itself utterly alarmed by the approach of a visitor. Does this all seem very fantastic? I do not think so. I can only say that to me the human spirit, when you reach it, seems a very gentle, innocent, and beautiful thing, horribly confined and bound.”

Again, in somewhat the same vein, he wrote : “ I cannot tell you what a relief it is that you do not want to *see* me, but that you are willing to write to me freely and say what you feel and think. I know so much more what you are like in this way than in any other. If we met, there would be fifty barriers between us which would distract me ; all the material and social attributes which I believe conceal rather than reveal the inner spirit. In writing thus there is hardly any barrier—nothing but handwriting ; and I think I even prefer a typewritten letter as more impersonal. Of course, even so, you cannot tell me all you think and feel, but at least the only obstacle is the code, the word, the phrase. I cannot be quite sure that these mean quite the same to us both, but that must take its chance.”

I asked him once what it was that made it so difficult for him to make friends with people in the ordinary way. This was his reply :

“ I do not find it at all difficult to make friends with people, as you seem to think. But what I feel increasingly is this. I have been given by nature perceptions which I believe to be painfully acute. My eyes, my ears, my touch are all preternaturally active, as well as taste and smell. I am extremely inquisitive about small details, not because I desire it but because I cannot help it. I take things in at a glance and cannot forget them. The furniture, papers, carpets of the few places where I live are so much in my mind that I can evoke an instantaneous mental picture of any room I know. It is just the same with trees, houses, buildings, landscapes, I can't forget the minutest details and neither can I help noticing them. This is all of the nature of a torment to me—and thus when it comes to people, every smallest defect of complexion, of feature, movement is terribly obvious to me, every inflection of voice, every gesture and habit. The result is, as I have said, that to make friends is like making my way through a forest of impressions, and the solitude in which I live is not so much of my own choosing as the only alternative to a sense of fatigue which entirely spoils my life. I don't describe this as a desirable or as a distinguished thing. I would give much to be short-sighted, hard of hearing, dull of sense ; and I should be intensely interested in human beings, if it were not for the intolerable number of defences through which I have to fight my way before I can find them.

You must believe me when I say that I hate the skulking and isolated way in which I live, but it is the only way possible. I am intensely aware of the beauty of the world and the beauty of human nature, but it is all wound up, so to speak, in stained bandages. I am sane, sensible, friendly within, but this insupportable sensitiveness separates me from life ; and that is why my dozen friends, who will write to me as you do, are such a boon to me."

I became gradually aware of Reginald Howe's very pure and delicate nature through his letters ; indeed I do not exaggerate when I say that he became to me as much like a disembodied spirit as it is possible to be. His descriptions, his visions, his sense of beauty had all an infinite charm, especially his account of the children and the animals he met, with whom as a rule he found himself singularly at ease. There really was nothing that was not wholly simple and sincere about him, and I began to realise him as a man cut off from human ties by a fastidiousness which was not a matter of affectation or pose, but a simply irresistible instinct.

" I ought not of course to live as I do," he once wrote, " I miss all kinds of brotherhood and companionship, for which I believe myself to be more fitted than most people. I really have no suspicions or unreasonable dislikes ; I think the human spirit the loveliest and most lovable thing in the world ; while God—the spirit behind the beauty and love of the world—is the best and closest reality of all. To say that I love God would be ridiculous. He is the one constant and over-

whelming fact to me, the soul of love and grace and beauty and gentleness and sweetness. He bends over me, He holds me embraced. I really do not trouble my head much about what this strange material element is in which we all seem to be stuck ; it is no part of God, I think. He deals with it as well as He can, casting His radiance upon it and making it often beautiful with His own beauty, like the sunlight upon peaks of snow. It is not all evil, but there is evil all about too, like a hateful putrefaction. Yet I am not frightened of it in the least ; it has no hold of me, and God is curing it by patient pity and love."

I urged upon him once the duty of fighting against his perceptions and doing something definite in the world to help things along.

He replied :

" I am not sure that it is my business to work or act more than I do. I believe in living innocently and happily. In the few places to which I go, I make a difference. It is not conceited to say this. And I think that I make some difference to my few correspondents. At least they entrust me with their troubles and difficulties, and I give them all the love I can. Is it really possible to do more ? I spend myself upon people, and yet if I did what is called social work, I do not think I should be of much use, and I know quite well that I should very soon be submerged. I am not useless altogether, and I am not selfish. I work enough to earn the very little work which others do for me ; and nine-tenths of the difficulties of the world seem to me to be caused by the fact that so many people desire what they do not need. I know my

effect is a very little one, but it is a real one ; and my conscience does not tell me that I am doing wrong."

Certainly Reginald did much for me ; his letters and the touch of his mind were infinitely refreshing, consoling, purifying. I do not think I was ever so conscious of what I mean by beauty as when I came within the range of his thought. He simplified and enriched life.

" Nothing much matters," he once wrote, " except the simplest experience. The world is growing better as fast as it can. We can do nothing by scolding, censuring, advising—we cannot do much by clearing up messes, shoving, fussing. We can do something by thinking clearly, feeling strongly, hoping, loving, living in joy. The world will not get more materialistic and more political ; it will become simpler and more poetical. The problem is how to give everyone as much liberty as he can use, and as little work as keeps him alive and sane. I don't want the world to become more and more fiercely industrious and competitive and elaborate ; I want it to be more free, leisurely and joyful. I want to see highly organised industrial communities melt away as the objects for which they exist become less instead of more desirable ; civilisation is not a mass of delicately balanced aims, but a strong and silent tide, running with many a sharp ripple of foam and many a listless backset past thwarting obstacles. It is at present highly organised because the equipoise is so nearly equal ; but as it wins, things will I believe get less and less complex, as man's desires become more reasonable, and his instinct to share more strong."

My one sight of him was thus. I had a letter from him, when I was staying in Sussex, which revealed the fact that he was living only a few miles away. I thought that if I prepared him for a meeting, he would elude me. I simply went over and captured him. I found him in simple lodgings in a tiny village in a dimple of the downs ; the place consisted of one or two farms, a few cottages, a little small-windowed church, and the ruins of a tiny castle which stood in a farmyard, the single tower which remained being used as a barn, while the mouldering gateway, with a room above the vaulted entrance, led straight into the byre. The cottages, built of flint and rubble, stood among orchards, and a few gnarled and wind-combed trees separated the gardens from the skirt of the down. He lodged in the house of an old farmer, where he was evidently much beloved by all. I found him sitting bareheaded on a rustic seat, looking on to the farm-garden. He was small and slender of form, very youthful-looking, with dark curling hair and large kindly eyes. He was sun-burnt and well-knit in frame. He rose up at my approach, and when I introduced myself, I saw a momentary look in his eyes as if he would have found safety in flight if it had been possible. But in a few minutes he was talking easily and lightly with an engaging and almost childlike charm. I told him he need not be alarmed, and that I would not claim his company for more than a single afternoon. I said that I could not bring myself to be quite so impersonal as he, and that I should be able to write far more freely and securely if I knew what sort of a person was at the other

end of the wire. We had a simple meal together, and we walked over the downs, sitting long in a sheltered hollow of the cliffs looking over the sea. I found him a very delightful companion, with a gift of quick and humorous talk abounding in rapid metaphor. I said something to him in the course of the afternoon about his unsociability. "Yes," he said, "I have tried to take the advice of Ruskin that it is the artist's business to fit himself for society and then to abjure it." "But why abjure it?" I said. "We have talked like old friends, easily and amiably enough!" "Yes," he said, "and I shall have enjoyed this rush of novelty into my tranquil existence." "I see you say 'Shall *have* enjoyed,'" I said, "and not 'enjoy'—" He smiled and nodded.

"Well," I said, "I will not intrude upon you, though I confess I would like to see more of you, and I believe we could get on simply enough in each other's company—but I respect a man's right to live as he chooses. But tell me this," I went on, "am I such a mass of barriers and defences as you seemed to fear?" "Oh, you seem accessible enough," he said, laughing, "as accessible as the old gateway of my farmyard—an amiable ruin." "Yes, I'm a ruin," I said, "no bolts and bars—just a shelter from wind and rain." But I had a feeling that, delightful as he was, he was yet determined and in a sense implacable. We came back in the late afternoon, had tea together in the farm-parlour, and I went my way. I said to him, as we shook hands—such a firm, delicate little hand his was—"Well, you have only to hold up your finger at any time, and I shall fly to see you—but I will

promise faithfully not to invade you again!" "That's kind of you," he said, smiling vaguely. "Well, we shall see." "No, I am afraid we *shan't* see," I said; "you are relentless, I know! But you may really feel safe." So I departed, and as I turned the corner of the road I saw him standing, looking after me. He waved his hand, and I saw him no more.

One more letter only I had from him. "It seems quite absurd and churlish," he wrote, "that I should repel your friendly advances. In a sense, perhaps, it is a mistake. I recognised your kindness, and there is much that you could and would give me. It is I who would fail you. As I grow older, I may change; and then I shall seek your company, because you inspire me with confidence. As it is I have disentangled myself from all that I cannot perform—and I can perform little—but do not think of me as merely wilful and selfish. Think of me rather as you would think of a monk, vowed to a certain life, renouncing many beautiful and desirable things for the sake of an idea. The theory may be a wrong one; it may be that we ought to seek weariness and pain; but I believe it to be the other way. I think that anyone who can avoid complexity without injury ought to do so. You may call me a heartless individualist, but I assure you that I do all I can to make the little circle in which I live happy. I wish I could persuade you of that. But I do not think that we ought to multiply relationships and responsibilities beyond our powers—that is a multiplication of unhappiness and discontent. I live at my full strength, and the lightness and freshness and joy

in which I spend my days is in my belief a sure sign of God's blessing. It may be of course that, like the Prodigal Son, I have taken the portion appointed to me and gone far from home, for my own delight. But to speak truly I rather hear in my ears, hour by hour, the words, 'Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.' I neither waste nor hoard my affections. I care for many simple people, who care for me, and I do not escape anxiety or sorrow. But I do not believe that there is any blessing at all upon powers strained by a vague good nature. It is not as if you needed me ; you have a full and generous life of your own, and I cannot help you. You have your own self-limitations, no doubt. You do not consider every request that comes to you the call of God ; and you must let me draw my own line. But I shall think affectionately of you, and I shall have a real hope and purpose of meeting you in an existence when we shall be more free and strong, less caged and hampered. So I will not even say good-bye, but only God bless and prosper you."

I never heard from him again ; and I heard almost by chance that he died not long after from a fall on one of the mountains in the Lakes—a crag near Crummoch Water ; his letters and my one sight of him the only memorial of the most beautiful and untroubled friendship I have ever known.

XXIII

FITTON

(1)

MR. RALPH FITTON was the kindest-hearted and most public-spirited of men, a Fellow and Lecturer of St. Faith's. He rose at seven-thirty and went to bed about one, and of his seventeen waking hours he devoted not less than twelve to work. His table was covered with the exercises of pupils, not indeed visibly, for he kept them sorted into six bags, like postbags of canvas, with a day of the week indicated on each in letters cut from the largest headlines of newspapers, and pasted on. He had, moreover, a set of twelve smaller receptacles which he called his "off-bags"—"off-bags, you know," for papers that were needed on more days than one. These were indicated by initials, and he would tell one that this simplified his work enormously.

The exercises, it must be said, were often misplaced, but as Fitton said, if that was the case with eighteen bags, where would he have been if he had had but a dozen? When discovered, the exercises looked like a fine piece of needlework. They were "roughly" corrected in blue ink and re-corrected in red. Then there followed what was called

"partial polishing," and finally a column of "eponyms," suggestions as to style and usage, which he was careful to tell his pupils were tentative rather than authoritative.

The table was covered with other contrivances, a box for the gummed side-strips off sheets of stamps, a box of cough-lozenges to ward off "that dryness of throat, so provoking when one is in full swing," a box labelled *Orts* into which broken nibs, the fractured lead of pencils, burst india-rubber bands were stored, which Mr. Fitton was going to return to the makers "some day when I have time." A daring pupil once asked him why he had a box of Oats on his table. "Oats? no, I have no oats here, not even wild oats, *he-he*,—oh, of course I see, most comical! Yes, I could only get a Gothic R—that shall be remedied!" The penholders were of cork, "very comforting against chilblains," and the sealing wax was made up of fragments, stuck together when they became too short to hold.

Mr. Fitton's rooms were furnished with the disregard for taste and comfort that might have been expected from a man who never saw anything but his work or his "dodges" and never sat anywhere but at his table. There was a hard short sofa and two wicker chairs, under one of which was concealed a pair of slippers. A lithograph of a stag by Landseer was over the chimney-piece, and a German reproduction of the Sistine Madonna, the tell-tale inscription on which was concealed during the war by a strip of stamp-paper with the words "from the original" written on it in red ink; the rest of the room was adorned with small photographs in so-called Oxford frames,

hung rather near the ceiling. There were some bookcases, the books of each series being arranged with number one to the right—" You have only to imagine yourself behind them," said Mr. Fitton. Walking-sticks and umbrellas lay transversely in a rack with three drinking vessels for dogs underneath in a row to catch the drops ; and Mr. Fitton pointed out that this was most convenient. " There they were, ready filled, if anyone should bring a dog to one's rooms."

This was Mr. Fitton's glory—to foresee every possible eventuality and to provide whatever anyone might require. Thus on the sideboard there was a spittoon, a bonnet-stand " in case a lady visitor might wish to remove her hat," a box with a small mirror and a paint-brush for removing a fly from the eye—" most fretting ! " said Mr. Fitton ; a bottle of saline " in case of a small rise of temperature," a jar of parrot-seed, and underneath a shallow tray of metal, with a carpenter's gouge carefully blunted and a blacking-brush, to remove mud from a visitor's boots. " I have been asked innumerable times for such things," said Mr. Fitton, " and it is so awkward to have to say that you are out of them."

In the bedroom, to which few ever penetrated, there were more " dodges " than ever. There were hooks to hang boots upon, a gong with its hammer close to the head of the bed—" there is nothing that wakes one up so effectually," said Mr. Fitton, " as a few strokes on a gong." There were rows of phials and gallipots and a box labelled Pomata, some brushes with bristles of steel, and close to the bed within reach of Mr. Fitton's hand was a

jar labelled Antispasmodic, an "Etna" for boiling an egg, and a baby's bottle filled on hot summer nights with orange-juice and water—"lemons are too heating"—or on days of festival with the delicious juice from canned peaches or pineapples.

Mr. Fitton's toilet was long and severe. "My beau-ideal is to come out of my room on the stroke of eight, feeling clean and comfortable!"—and the undergraduate who occupied the contiguous bedroom said that after the gong was heard, you would think that someone was cleaning a car. There was no doubt about the cleanliness. The scent of carbolic soap was perceptible even in the sitting-room until the middle of the morning; while Mr. Fitton himself appeared so rasped and scarified by the process, and in so high a fever, that the wonder was that the saline bottle was not always empty.

(2)

In spite, however, of these eccentricities Fitton was far from being an unsociable man; he proffered endless hospitality, mainly to undergraduates, often of a singular kind, such as woodcocks at five o'clock tea, porter-cup, and black currant wine made from a recipe of his grandmother's. Such a fearful joy, however, attended the uncertainty as to what you might get to eat, and his arrangements to keep things hot were so precarious that the proceedings were apt to be hilarious. Mr. Fitton himself joined eagerly in the laughter whether he knew the cause or not and was accustomed to add, "Such a good thing to have a hearty laugh—I am told it is excellent for the

diaphragm." But apart from these private kindnesses, which endeared him to many of the young men, he was unfailingly benevolent in all sorts of quiet ways. He offered to coach men gratis, he subsidised poorer students, and these benefits were offered with a tortuous diplomacy which would have been grotesque had not its intention been so patently generous and sincere.

One of his beneficiaries was a young man named Pearce, who had eventually been elected to a Fellowship and was thus one of Fitton's junior colleagues. Pearce was not only grateful, but had realised the extraordinary simplicity and unselfishness of Fitton's character ; and the two were close friends. One evening Pearce knocked at Fitton's door and was bidden to enter with the cheerful halloo with which Fitton welcomed a caller. Fitton abandoned his work, and made tea, but conversation languished ; till at last rather sheepishly Pearce said. " The fact is, Fitton, I have come to ask your help "—" Which I shall assuredly and gladly give," said Fitton. There was an elderly Don, Mr. Merridew, a widower but many-daughtered and Bursar of a neighbouring College, who was a contemporary and close ally of Fitton's. It was indeed one of the few houses at which he often turned in uninvited. Pearce managed in a variety of guarded phrases to convey to Fitton the fact that he had fallen in love with Phyllis Merridew, a communication which filled Fitton with bewilderment. " She is my god-daughter," he said several times in an agitated tone." " So much the better," said Pearce at last. " But it doubles my responsibility," said Fitton anxiously. He

delivered himself up to deep reflection for a moment and then said, "You would like me to be your ambassador—or perhaps even your plenipotentiary to Mr. Merridew?" "No," said Pearce, "it is something much more simple than that. I have reason to believe that Phyllis is well-disposed to me, but the fact is that I can never get a word with her alone. If I call they are all five in the room; they even hunt in couples." "I was not even aware that they did hunt," said Fitton in an anxious voice. "And I thought," went on the bashful suitor, "that you might ask Phyllis to tea, and be called away or something, and I might get a word with her—I believe it only wants that." "Would it not be better to communicate with her by letter?" said Fitton. "No, I have tried that a dozen times," said Pearce—"and it all seems so stiff." "What about glancing over Ovid's *Ars Amoris*?" said Fitton. "I am strangely ignorant of these things. Were I to be empanelled among a jury of matrons, I should be entirely out of my depth." "No, I don't think that Ovid's line is quite the line I want to take." Fitton mused and shook his head, till he suddenly looked up and said brightly, "I have it! I will ask her to tea—some anniversary—that of my own confirmation, for instance, shall be my excuse. I will inform you of the day and hour, and you shall drop in as if spontaneously and uninvited. Or would it be better that you should be concealed in my bedroom—I could give the signal for your entry by a significant cough."

"I think that would be a little too dramatic," said Pearce. "Let me just look in as if by chance."

"The scheme becomes clearer to me every minute," said Fitton. I will press you to stay to tea, and I will previously mislay some necessary appendage of the tea-table. I will then excuse myself, delay my return, taking care to give due warning of my approach, and all will be well. Pearce, I believe I shall positively enjoy this—I have always had a taste for diplomacy!"

(3)

The destined day arrived, and Fitton became every hour more nervous. He rehearsed the arrangements many times over, with two sofa-cushions representing Phyllis and Pearce. Indeed he was just saying for the twentieth time, "My incurable carelessness! It would seem that I have omitted the butter," when the cheerful heroine herself walked in, and said, "What *are* you doing, god-papa? You look as if you were having a little play all by yourself!" She gave him an encouraging kiss, and surveying the rooms, said, "You seem to be very comfortable, dear! If you were married you wouldn't be allowed to have your own way like this." "My dear child," said Mr. Fitton gallantly, "your presence in my rooms makes me realise for the first time what I have missed! But marriage, my dear, is a serious responsibility!" "So all the young men in Cambridge seem to think," said Phyllis abstractedly, "our family record is disgraceful—I am thinking seriously of becoming a typist."

It was at this moment that Pearce made his appearance, and at the sight of him Miss Phyllis suddenly lost her gay unconcern. "Ha, come in,

Pearce ! ” said Mr. Fitton. “ No, indeed you are not interrupting us. You know Miss Merridew, my god-daughter. You must stay and help to entertain her. We were just talking about—about all sorts of things. Stay ! ” with a look of vexation. “ I have neglected to provide myself with milk. You must excuse me for a moment. It is hard by.”

It was indeed, for Mr. Fitton had placed the jug on a small slab just outside his door. He took it away with him, and going downstairs, spent some time in reading all the notices upon the Hall screens. When twenty minutes had elapsed, for he paid frequent visits to the door to consult the clock, he returned, heralding his approach by a perfect tornado of convulsive coughs. “ Here we are,” he said, putting the jug down triumphantly on the table. Phyllis was sitting on the sofa where he had left her, and Pearce was standing on the hearthrug. “ I could not find anyone about,” he went on, “ and I seem to have contracted a slight catarrh—where are my lozenges ?—what is this ? ” Phyllis had risen from her place and came to him half laughing and half crying. “ Dearest god-papa,” she said, “ I am ever so grateful to you for asking me to tea—and even more grateful to you for going away to get the milk ! ” “ Yes, Fitton, it’s all right,” said Pearce, coming forward and taking Phyllis’s hand in his own. “ Then all the young men are not quite so bad, Phyllis,” said Fitton. “ Dear me, when you come to think of it, what a fortunate chapter of accidents this afternoon has been ! ”

XXIV

PATRICIA

I HAD never been to stay with my old friend, Henry Frost, since his marriage. His wife was the daughter of a clergyman, John Pycroft by name, who had been for five-and-twenty years a schoolmaster, and had then retired to a country living. There he lived with his four daughters, each of whom was said to be "interested" in something. One took up music scientifically, one was a lecturer in a Women's College in London, one was a writer on literary subjects, and one was engaged in social work. The mother ran the parish, and the father filled his leisure by writing on educational subjects. I had never been to the house, but I had met two of the girls, and had found them rather drearily well-informed, and what they themselves called frank, while other people called it rude. They were handsome girls, with large clear eyes and loud bell-like voices, but a trifle hard-featured; and they were always serviceably dressed.

Frost's father was a clergyman in the same neighbourhood, and Frost was a good deal at Mr. Pycroft's Rectory. Frost himself was a master at a public school, very industrious, rather conventional, more enthusiastic than successful as

a teacher, the sort of man who, if he were teaching Vergil, would spend a good deal of time in looking up parallels in Dante, and quoting them till his boys loathed the very name of Dante. Indeed, when Frost once treated me to a disquisition on the subject, the parallels struck me more as reflecting credit on Frost's ingenuity in tracing a resemblance than lending any interest to either author. However, that was Frost's way, and it was impossible to convince him that it was not the best way. He was undoubtedly a good fellow, but with the habits, I used to think, of a bumble-bee in spectacles, apt to pore into a subject, and to boom on about it without ever noticing if he interested his companions. However, I knew Frost well enough—he was a fellow-undergraduate of mine—to say that I had heard enough about Dante; when, with a mild protest against my volatility and restlessness of mind, he would desist, until he had found another subject to boom about. The fault of his mind was that he could not shift it easily from one topic to another. He swung at anchor, until his cable was severed, when he drifted helplessly.

I was not surprised when I heard of his engagement to Patricia Pycroft, whom he humorously called "Madam Ppt," "in imitation of old Swift," he was careful to add. She was the literary one, and it was understood that after her marriage she would work as hard as ever at her subject, a process which Frost called "self-effectuation."

I became aware at last that I was giving offence by never going to see them; and I determined to spend a couple of days with them in the

vacation, at their cottage in Hampshire, not very far from the Pycroft Rectory. They decided that they must give up foreign travel, in the interests of Patricia's work, except for a rush at Easter to Florence, for what Frost called "a Botticelli jaunt." It was important, he told me, once a year, to sluice the mind with art, for educational purposes. Patricia was going to be a sort of elder sister to Frost's pupils, and was to be addressed as Madonna: just the right blend of chivalry, familiarity and deference. So they needed the other vacations for quiet work.

I found a new house of rough-cast and red tiles, with little bow-windows hung with high-minded hand-woven curtains. There was very little furniture in any of the rooms, and no arm-chairs to speak of. My bedchamber was singularly destitute of conveniences, and there was no arrangement for excluding the light, which woke me up unpleasantly early; but that I found was a fancy of Patricia's which she called "seeing the dawn come in"—it came into my room with a vengeance, and the lack of sleep which resulted gave me a light-headed feeling for most of the day. Nothing was unpacked for me, because Patricia knew that people hated having their clothes muddled up, and rather elaborate arrangements were made to prevent one's reading in bed, which Patricia thought was lazy.

I found another guest there, a rather mournful young man, an old pupil of Frost's, whose mind Patricia was forming. I was not sure if he was drinking deep of light and joy, or if he was in a state of mild rebellion; but he had evidently surrendered at discretion.

They were at tea when I came ; and after tea we walked a long time in the rather bare acre surrounding the cottage, not to see anything exactly, but to hear where everything was to be.

At dinner—we did not dress—Patricia attacked me mercilessly about the selfishness of men. It was a heavy-handed method, but I have reason to think since that it was meant to be a sprightly kind of humour. She warned me that she had extracted from Henry many particulars about my past, which she produced for my discomfiture. They bore a horrible resemblance to realities, and I had never reflected before how discreditable some of my little habits could appear. Henry appeared to enjoy the talk very much, and glanced approvingly at his wife at intervals. “ I hear you do most of your writing,” she said, “ in an arm-chair—and I regret to say I know of several passages in your books where ‘ snooze ’ is written large over the page. You must take a little anti-rest cure while you are with us ! ” Presently she went on to talk of Elizabethan song-writers, and informed us that she had made a great discovery only a day or two before—namely that Lodge’s song, “ No more you’ll seek,” was undoubtedly suggested by a lyric of Desportes’, if indeed it was not almost a paraphrase. She went on to speak about the influence of Remy Belleau on English song-writers, and when, after an ineffectual attempt to take a part in the talk, she extracted from me the confession that I had never heard of either Desportes or Belleau, she had a moment of real triumph. “ It’s simply incredible ! ” she said. “ Where have you been, if I may ask ? ” “ In

my arm-chair, no doubt," I said ; which was well received.

After dinner Frost read Browning aloud in the drawing-room, and we were not allowed to smoke. I lost the thread of the poem in some unaccountable way, and made a poor show when we were asked to analyse it ; but the old pupil was still more hopeless, and was gaily sacrificed, Patricia saying that he would find it better to harmonise life with Browning than Browning with life, the profundity of which comment I have hardly even yet fathomed. When we had finished with the poem, Frost looked at me and the pupil and said, " Look here, is anyone enjoying this ? " There was no response, till Patricia said, " Well, I am, very much—but you read a thought monotonously, Henry, I felt. It needs a little more *capriccio*—let me have the book ! " She read a poem with strange jerks and whines, which seemed to me very unpleasant. However, Henry said that it was very dramatic, which saved the situation.

We got to bed in good time. I smoked a cigarette out of the window, and unfortunately dropped the end on the flagged path which surrounded the house. As soon as I had taken my place at the breakfast-table the luckless end was handed to me on a plate by Patricia, who said it was a natural curiosity, and asked me for an explanation.

The first morning I was left to my own devices, and in company with the old pupil, who now appeared to me to have a faint sense of rebellion, we made ourselves fairly comfortable in a verandah, by transferring a cushion or two from the parlour—it was on no account to be called the drawing-

room—and by putting our feet up on some rush-bottomed stools which stood there.

In the middle of the morning Patricia passed by and held out a flower to us to look at. “What do you call that?” she said triumphantly. “I suppose it is a natural curiosity!” I said. A faint sound like the ghost of a guffaw issued from the old pupil’s lips. Patricia felt the need to strike. “I suppose it is the new sort of manners,” she said, “for men not to rise to their feet when their hostess appears.” We rose reluctantly, and Patricia said to the pupil, “Charles, let me solemnly warn you against arm-chair manners.”

In the afternoon we all walked together, and I retain no recollection of what happened, except that I was suffering from a crushing sense of fatigue. After tea I went up to my room resolutely and lay down; but even so, I did not wholly escape, because I heard Patricia walking beneath my window say in her most carrying tones to her husband, “Surely Mr. — must be ill—it can’t be *mere* selfishness! I had so looked forward to a real fresh talk about books, but he seems to have forgotten the most ordinary facts, if indeed he ever——” The rest of her sentence was lost as she turned the corner; but it was soon renewed. Henry must have been attempting some sort of defence, because presently Patricia was audible again—“accounts, I suppose, for his really melancholy mannerisms—no freshness or clearness of thought, no onset or seriousness—just a helpless dependence on a youthful charm, which I must say is rather out of place now.” A faint booming followed and then Patricia said,

" Sell ? Yes, perhaps they do—and that seems to me the final and ultimate disgrace. Why, we *know* that only two hundred copies of Robinson's *Phantasy of Delights* were ever printed ; and the glory of failure, as Browning . . ."

I got away the following morning in a very damaged condition, but not without a few hard words from Patricia. She accused me of trying to pervert the mind of Charles. She looked at me with limpid eyes and said, " Mr. —, let me be serious for a moment. I could not help feeling that in talking before Charles you took up what I really thought to be a cynical tone. I know, of course, you didn't mean it ; but that sort of humour is so misleading, and we have great hopes of Charles. I don't object to an intermingling of lightness with ordinary talk—indeed I must plead guilty to doing it almost too much myself—but one ought to be able, ought one not, to say frankly and boldly that one *is* serious. There should be no mistake about that." " Oh, yes," I said, " there ought to be no mistake either about humour or seriousness—but they must take their chance, mustn't they ? It is disconcerting to be always having to explain which is which."

I fear that Patricia rather hated me at that moment. " You mean ? " she said, and then broke off. But making a gallant effort she went on, " After all, a little visit like this is rather a ' performance,' isn't it ? I hope that some time you may be persuaded to come and share our life here for a little—but, of course, we can't offer you luxuries, and if you can't do without them . . . anyhow, it is good of you to have come, and you

have lifted—I know I may say this—quite a little shadow off Henry's mind ; he was afraid that his old friendship was a little obscured, when we had hoped you would find two friends here instead of one."

I lied boldly and joyfully then ! I don't think I convinced her ; in fact, Patricia's soul recoiled from mine, and mine, I fear, from hers.

I am sure she is a good woman ; and I am equally sure that she makes Henry happy. What will happen to Charles I don't know ; I rather fear he has gone over to the enemy, very meekly though, and may perhaps be reconquered.

Henry saw me off, and I fear we realised it had been a failure. I certainly went off with " no serious intention," as Carlyle said of Southey, of ever meeting again, except, perhaps, on wholly neutral ground.

XXV

THE HAPPY POTION

Not long ago an old friend of mine, Ned Carey, married a girl a good deal younger than himself. It was an interesting marriage. He had been long given up, from the matrimonial point of view. He is something in the City, a general merchant, I believe, whatever that may be. He is wealthy, and has a comfortable house with a good garden out in Hampstead. Until the time of his marriage he lived a rather secluded life, fond of books and art. He was generally supposed to be very contented, but I always felt of him that he desired experience and a closer hold in life, and that he was really only passing the time till something more interesting should befall him. Then he suddenly fell in love with this girl, the daughter of a widowed and retired politician, James Cobbe, a diner-out, a traveller, a writer of somewhat lifeless historical books, who entertained a good deal; you always met men of the hour at his house—rather of the hour than of the century—whom he was “bringing out,” and he was fond of saying that So-and-so had “arrived.” It was rather a dreary intellectual *milieu*, I always thought. I used to go there occasionally, and found it rather fatiguing and rather frightening.

Cobbe was very polite, but if there were gaps in one's knowledge, they were somehow sure to be detected ; and old Cobbe had a way of seeming mentally to shrug his shoulders, if one lost hold of the thread for an instant, and to be saying to himself, " What is the use of talking to people who haven't even got their facts right ? " I knew the girl slightly—slim, very pretty, taking just her right share in the conversation, ready to have things explained to her by the seediest doctrinaire and making herself really very useful in the conversation by daring, in the character of an ingénue, to ask for information, when the conversation grew hazy, and when it was obvious that all but the particular expert were getting out of their depth. Carey fell slowly and deeply in love with the girl and carried her off by sheer persistence.

Well, the thing was all pleasantly arranged ; I wrote to Carey to congratulate him and got a charmingly diplomatic letter from him in reply, with a postscript by Miss Cobbe to say that I must not be jealous, or think I was going to lose a friend by marriage, to which I replied in the orthodox fashion that I felt sure I was only going to be gaining a friend and so forth—the pleasant meaningless politeness which signify no more than international compliments.

As soon as the honeymoon was over I was asked to dine with them quietly. There was no one there but a sister of Mrs. Carey's, and I was glad to find Carey himself perfectly radiant, as pleased as Punch with his young and charming wife, and having neither eyes nor ears for anyone else.

Then came my disillusionment. The talk ranged

freely over a lot of quite interesting subjects. Mrs. Carey knew all about them, could place and appraise everyone who was mentioned, knew exactly what was the exact weight of everybody's opinion, what gave it force and what vitiated it, knew who had arrived and who mattered. It was all an admirably laid mosaic, and I could not help admiring the extraordinary skill with which she marshalled her facts. But—and here was the misery—of genuine or spontaneous interest I could detect not a trace. She was much too well-bred to be complacent, but I got that grievous sensation that her object in it all was to be known to know, to be seen to be abreast of it all, to handle it all. It was done with a sort of modest diffidence so that she never appeared to be laying down the law ; but she could tell us what had happened behind the scenes in a political crisis, she said that such and such a book was brilliant enough but did not lead anywhere, she was acquainted with the secret history of an appointment which had caused surprise ; she knew, in fact, all about a thing except the thing itself, and her remarks were all gently qualified. She could not be sure, but she believed that she remembered that Mr. Balfour had said something to that effect—the Lord Chancellor had been an old friend of her father's, and he had hinted at something of this sort. All her statements were made under the shield of some indubitable expert. She spoke with gaiety and spirit, and I discerned in her a real intention that I should be pleased and made welcome ; and thus I felt a great brute, but not as great a brute as I should have felt if I had not realised

how tremendously complete the girl's panoply was ; she had taken it direct with his permission from her father's hands. I felt, too, that she was in the wrong place with dear old muddled, gentle Carey. She would have been a perfect wife for a rising cabinet minister, because there was a real intellectual quality about the whole. She had learned her lesson perfectly and remembered it perfectly ; and yet I felt that she missed the essence of everything. She was like an intelligent chauffeur knowing all about the machinery of a car and caring nothing about the motive power. There was some art talk, and she knew about the technique and the influences of schools—all the subsidiary things.

The result upon me was simply a gradual withdrawal of all sense of life, because she left off being interested in every question at precisely the point where I began to be interested in it. Yet Carey was obviously in the seventh heaven, and it fills me with shame now to reflect on the nauseous praise which I pumped up out of some receptacle of frothy words, when we were left alone together. I could say with absolute truth that she was perfectly wonderful, and that I had never seen so much intelligence combined with such charming modesty. And after all Carey is entirely in love with her, so that nothing else matters at present. But I don't think he is the sort of man who can continue to live by bread alone. The girl has got no soul, I believe. She appeared to regard emotion as a weakness except when it could make a defined position for itself. Her view of life seemed to be a scene where one

could make oneself felt : that was to be the object ; not to have anything at heart, not to wind oneself into things, not to woo what one desired, but to ride forth conquering and to conquer. My own idea of life is that one must somehow learn to give, and unlearn as far as possible the natural instinct to take. I think that a position must come and ought not to be made. One ought not to begin by despising worldliness ; one ought to begin by admiring its efficiency and fearing its horrible strength ; but one ought also to learn to see through it, and to find out how little it brings that is worth having.

Mrs. Carey is for me a sort of personification of the world ; she is so beautiful, so fragrant, so accomplished, so clean-minded, so clear-sighted that one can't overlook her. But she gives me a sort of terror because her very strength and completeness seem so utterly admirable and desirable. She has indeed arrived ! While to me the whole point of life seems not to arrive, but to be always travelling. I don't think her capable of suffering. She might be vexed with herself and angry with another ; but she would never show either. She would say to herself that she must not make such a mistake again, and that she ought to have dealt more diplomatically with anyone who had incurred her wrath. She is tolerant of others simply because she does not care enough about them to be intolerant. I think she would be a good friend, and I feel that it would please her to do me a service or to help me in any way, not for my sake but for her own. I wonder what she will make of old Ned ? She will never allow herself to be

disappointed with him, and she will never require anything of him that she doesn't feel sure he will perform. I don't have any doubt that she will make him absurdly happy, and show him off to the very best advantage. And yet I don't think that they have a single thing in common.

We had quite a pretty little scene on parting. When I came upstairs she made room for me beside her, drove her husband and her sister away, asked me if I had had a good talk, said to me that there was one thing she wished to say—that I was never to hesitate about taking Ned off by himself if I wanted him. “I know,” she said, “that with the best intentions in the world we women do spoil men's friendships—they can't possibly talk together as they can when we are not by—so you must promise me not to think of me at all—I must just come in if I can”—she said this with the most enchanting look of candour and sweetness, and yet I felt that she felt how perfectly she understood the situation.

So I paid out my coin as handsomely as I could. I said that I had never seen Ned so happy in my life, and that I had always felt that what he wanted was some reality of life which she had given him, and I went on to pay her the one compliment which never fails or palls. “But you must remember,” I said, “that at present I am rather afraid of you.”

“Afraid?” she said with a delighted little laugh, “a man like you with such an influence, such a circle of admirers.”

“I hope you are not going to confess yourself one,” I said. “I don't know exactly why it is,

but if anyone expresses himself an admirer of my books, I at once suspect his intellectual capacity."

"Isn't that rather cynical?" she said with a quick smile. "I don't profess to follow you always, but I know how much you mean to many people."

"Oh," I said, "one says what one thinks as clearly as one can, but I have no illusions about myself."

"Well," she said, "you must allow us to have our illusions; and at all events I know how much your friendship has meant to Ned, and I am grateful for that, and don't want to interfere with it, though I should like to increase it if I knew how."

"Well," I said, "we shall see; and after all the point is that you have made absolutely the whole difference to Ned—there's no question of that—he looks ten years younger already."

"Some day," she said, smiling, "I shall ask you to tell me what you meant by saying you were afraid of me."

"Why," I said, "I will tell you that now. It is all so perfect and complete; you seem to know everything and to see everything. You have got all the gifts which one desires and admires, and it seems as if it would be impossible not to disappoint you—as if one could not satisfy your standard."

"Ah, I have no standards," she said lightly. "Don't think that—that sounds unpleasant. I do know that I have got a great many things without deserving or earning them, and I hope that it may be the case with your friendship too!"

Wasn't that a perfect sort of conversation? But it wouldn't do, alas! I can see no bridge between me and this gracious little lady, though I dare say we shall enact some pretty scenes together, and keep up our conventional romance faithfully enough. And after all, Ned will be happy; which is after all the point.

XXVI

ARISTOCRACY

I HAVE had a curious visitor to-day and the interview was half amusing and half irritating. He was no less a person than Lord Stanton, who, as all the world knows, is an ex-Minister, and a man of affairs as well as a man of fashion, very rich, very able, very distinguished—everything, in fact, that human beings agree to desire and admire. I must not tell you what he came about because that is a secret, though not an important one. He wrote me a very polite note and asked if he might call to see me. I graciously gave permission, and he arrived at 2.30 yesterday. I confess I was rather shy of the interview, though why I was embarrassed is more than I can say. He can't in these democratic days do anything to injure me, and there is nothing that he can do for me that I know of. I suppose it is an old feudal instinct, and probably quite inconsistent with self-respect ; still one is vaguely alarmed at so much heavy artillery brought into action.

He is a fine-looking man, thin, clean-shaven, rather dark-complexioned, moving with great gracefulness ; and he gesticulates as he talks with his fine shapely hands. One would almost have taken him for a foreigner. He has none of that

"imbecile unconsciousness of everyone else's presence," which Chesterton says used to be considered the hall-mark of social pre-eminence. Rather the reverse in fact. He has got rather a gentle confiding manner, with a quick little smile, and not the smallest stiffness or pomposity. He had time to look about him, and he said he envied me my house, which is rather good from the owner of High Stanton. He said a pleasant word or two about my books, which he seemed to have read. Our business was soon over and I was able to do what he wanted, which put him in a good-humour. He said he would like to look round the buildings, and displayed a good deal of knowledge and taste.

So far so good ; but he sat on for half an hour and talked about literature ; and then he annoyed me because he seemed to me so unintentionally condescending. He seemed to think writing was a graceful and meritorious sort of accomplishment, which no one would practise unless he was obliged, but which could bring a man into a sort of fictitious prominence, like that of a conjurer or a singer. I don't mean that he said so in so many words, but he implied that there was nothing really in it, and that writers just existed to amuse the rich and great, and perhaps to make a few pounds by their performance. He paid me the compliment of treating me as a gentleman who wrote for my amusement, and he made some really fatuous comments on the writers of the day. He said that he was glad that Kipling was settling down seriously to politics, and that Bernard Shaw had a wonderful *flair* for knowing what people would be interested in two months

ahead. He said that he was always impatient of critics, and asked indignantly who created literary laws. When I replied that I supposed that it was the same power which created the law of gravity, he smiled indulgently, and when I added that people only discovered laws and did not make them, he said he wished it was true of the House of Commons. He said that a nephew of his had consulted him about taking up writing. "I told him," he said, "that it was all very well as a hobby—I'm sure you will agree with me—but it was hardly a profession. 'Believe me,' I said to Jack, 'you don't know what impossible people it will bring you in contact with—and it leads nowhere—nowhere at all!'"

Then he went on to say that it was very remarkable that a man like Lord Purley could, without any previous training, have produced a book of travels that would have made the fortune of any writer; and when I said that it was very remarkable indeed, he did not seem to suspect me of irony. Then he said confidentially, "Of course I can say this to you without being misunderstood, but what so many writers have not got is the touch of the gentleman—in the best sense of the word, of course. Look at Byron, Shelley, Walter Scott, Coleridge—either they had no certain standard of breeding—it's a horrible word, or else their taste went to pieces; there is always something which grates upon one. Of course in these days it doesn't do to talk about origin—but it is curious to see how many of our best writers have been men of good family; why, I was told the other day that Carlyle had some claim to an old peerage. Of

course," he added, laughing, " I am well aware that there are plenty of my friends in the Upper House—it's almost a stigma to belong to it nowadays—who have no taste in literature ; but that's perhaps the effect of a classical education, if I may dare to say so to you—a little too stiff, I fancy. But, on the other hand, a good family tradition does give a man a sort of balance ; just takes off a touch of vulgarity, because there is nothing left to be vulgar about."

It was no use arguing, and indeed I did not know where to begin ; so I said something feeble about art being an expression of personality.

" Exactly," he said, " of personality ! I've been talking very incautiously, I'm afraid ; but I see you understand me. One has to be careful, in a democracy, to appear to think that being a gentleman is rather a disadvantage than otherwise—but the personality does come out, doesn't it ? "

He went away professing himself delighted with our talk—" Such a refreshment," he said, " to get out of political and social gossip for an hour or two in a place like this—I quite envy you ! "

He left me rather appalled by what is a very appalling phenomenon—the stupidity of a very clever man. He is a great success in the world ; and his talk about literature gave me the sense of how degraded a position it holds in the scale of active forces. I don't mean the power of the Press—that's forcible enough ; but the power of literature regarded as an art—it is just a hobby, a recreation for mild, ineffective, low-born people ! A man like Stanton regards it (and I expect he so regards religion too) as a cheap way of consoling

oneself if one has not got any of the things which matter, as a sort of anodyne for conscious failure. Yet he evidently thinks he has got to the bottom of it. Posthumous fame he would regard as a very poor sort of bubble ; what he values is being on the top here and now. But I don't quarrel with his view of life exactly : nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand people frankly envy Stanton, and would like to have his position and resources. That is a fact which has an obstinate reality about it. But what I quarrel with is his assumption that he has looked into art and sees that there is really nothing in it ; and it is this which stamps him a stupid man, because he is so unperceptive.

I think he feels that he has been thoroughly kind and amiable to me to-day. He thinks that it pleased me that he should talk to me as if I was one of his lot, and on his side of the fence. He believes that he has exhibited a tactful sympathy. There is no reason, of course, why he should want to conciliate me, but part of his strength is that he is so apparently unassuming and unaffected, and that he always thinks it as well to make a friend rather than an enemy.

But he gives me the sense of being horribly, odiously, good-naturedly powerful, in all the ways which don't really matter. He rules—there is no doubt about that. He can't mould public opinion, but he can take full advantage of it ; and the awful point about it is that so far as public opinion goes, he has taken the measure of it, and is right, while I am wrong.

XXVII

SOCIAL PLEASURES

I WAS staying in town not long ago, and was taken out one evening to a dinner party to which my host and hostess had long been engaged. Not a single one of the guests was known to me, and I went with a considerable degree of curiosity, being still haunted in spite of my fifty and more years with the imperishable hope that I may still meet the one perfectly gracious and mysterious being for whom I have all my life waited, with whom reticence will be unknown and misunderstandings impossible. I have formed, moreover, a theory that the one way to triumph over the dull relations of life is to plunge at once directly and frankly into personal and friendly talk. I desired to follow the example of a witty and sympathetic lady of my acquaintance of whom her friends delightedly relate that she was introduced in a drawing-room to the chilliest and most formidable of savants, and that, as she passed down the staircase to the dining-room, she was heard to say to him: "Now as soon as we get settled, you will have to give me your full reasons for telling us that earwigs are such good mothers." I was anxious to put this mode of attack into practice and conduct a boarding expedition into my

neighbours' hearts and souls. That may sound very cold-blooded, but it is not ; it is just the other way. I do very much want to know what all the people who are trudging along with me, shoulder by shoulder, on the misty path of life, think and feel about it all—whether they like their pilgrimage, why they like it, what they are at, what they want to do and to be and to avoid ; and one of the most unsatisfactory things about life is that people either will not or cannot tell you. It is as disappointing as Shelley's experience, when he took the baby out of its mother's arms on Magdalen Bridge, patted its fat cheeks, and said to the bewildered mother : " Can your child tell us anything about pre-existence ? " " No, Sir, it can't speak yet ! " " How provoking ! " cried Shelley, " it knows, no doubt, and will not tell us ; and when it can speak, it will have forgotten all about it ! " Most people have either forgotten, or they will not speak. The misfortune is that through some dull inheritance of caution, men and women will not give themselves away ; but I have outlived that, and am perfectly prepared to give an answer to any serious and civil question.

The proceedings were orthodox enough. As we went up the stairs, a little late, we heard a noise in an upper room like the loud screams of pigs in a farmyard when they see the tub and ladle approaching—the strident accents of bold men mingled with the shriller cries of women. We made our way in ; a big brightly furnished room, with women sitting and standing, ancient majestic females, handsome matrons, elegant girls, interspersed with formidable lean men with moustaches, short clean-

shaven men, rotund, spectacled grey-headed men, while the shout of the company went up. A hostess disengaged herself, swam up to us, and a shy boisterous man added his felicitations. I was hurriedly introduced to a jovial lady whose name I did not catch, and a moment after the procession started.

On my left was a lady on whose face the word spinster was legibly written. She had a pince-nez, and on her firm lips there was written a resolution to keep human-kind, and especially masculine human-kind, at arm's length. My jovial lady talked away, and needed nothing more than a formal response. She gave me her views on shyness, and said that she always told her husband, who professed to be shy, that it all came from thinking too much about himself: "If he could but throw himself into some other train of thought, take an interest in what other people were thinking about, not care what impression he made on them, it would be all right. Now I don't care a bit," she added, "what you or anyone else thinks of me; I just rattle on!"

She did indeed rattle on, like dried peas in a bladder. She gave me her ideas on politics: "I can't think," she said, "why those Radicals can't leave us alone; we were quite comfortable without them, and now they come in, and do their best to make everyone discontented. I hope you are not a Radical? Somehow I feel—I know I am wrong, because there are some people of quite good family among them—but I find it very hard to believe that any gentleman can really be a Radical." I said something feeble about the condition of the poorer classes "Ah," she said, "I see you are a senti-

mentalist. You may believe me when I say that what people want is to be kept in their place ; it is this wretched ambition to ape their betters which spoils the lower class." She went on to give me a number of instances of the discourtesy and ingratitude of the labourers on her husband's estate. There was certainly no mistake about this lady's views, and no question whatever that she took no interest in my views ; and when a shift in the table took place, and I found myself in a position to speak to my next neighbour, I experienced some relief. But an unfortunate question about foreign travel drew down upon me a narrative of a bicycling tour in North Italy, which she had recently taken in the company of her brother.

" It was such fun—one felt so free from all ordinary conventions. We just went where we liked, and stayed anywhere, for the roads were dreadful—we often led our bicycles the whole day, but we came to such charming villages ; do you know Rigolet-to, such a dear little place near Assisi, with such narrow streets and such curious houses, with such dear little churches crammed in anywhere. We used to stay at the funniest inns, and take our meals with the quite common people. I don't know much Italian, but I got along somehow, and they always used to say that I spoke like a native. There was a dear old man, a priest, at one place who paid me so many compliments. " You English are a wonderful people," he said, " as strong as little horses, and afraid of nothing." I suppose that was the impression one made on them, because they seemed such sincere people without any pretences. Then there was another

little village we stayed at—Seval-lo—do you know Seval-lo? Such a dear little place, where everyone went out of their way to be kind to us—such odd little dirty streets, and a tiny old cathedral—the dearest place—in a curious kind of piaz-za. I am afraid you think my pronunciation of these words quite affected, but one gets into the way of talking like that; perhaps that was why they always seemed able to understand my Italian—they said I had got quite a Tuscan accent; they used to ask me if I came from Siena.”

This monologue went on without intermission; and the worst of it was that I felt that the woman was really seeing and feeling the beauty of what she described, but she did not understand that it was material for reflection and recollection, not for conversation. Scenery is a thing to be enjoyed, not to be spoken of! Later on I was recaptured by the first lady, who told me with a sense of apparent injury that she had found out who I was, and that she knew that I wrote books.

“ I have seen them on people’s tables, I think. I suppose you are quite a great man! But I must tell you that I did once look into one of your books, and I did not at all agree with what you said about solitude—it seemed to me much too morbid—you don’t mind my saying that? ” I assured her that I did not mind in the least.

“ I can’t think,” she said, “ why clever people like you want to put all these fancies into other people’s heads. I don’t think it is at all healthy. People ought not to have views about things. They ought just to do their duty and enjoy themselves as they go along—I like to see happy people about me, and if

ever I feel at all depressed, which is not often, I just jump up and do something. All this talk about art and music does a great deal of harm, because it unsettles people and makes them proud of being sensitive. I wish you would write a really cheerful and wholesome book, which would do people good. You must not mind my talking like this, because I always say exactly what I think. My dear father always said of me that I was so frank, and I think we ought all to be frank, don't you ? " I did not venture to imagine what the good lady would have thought if I had indulged in a little frankness ; but as her mind was evidently made up on every point, and her sense of her own rightness of view on the whole of life quite unalterable, I did not offer any objections.

When the ladies left the room, I found myself sitting next a very civil elderly man whose name I did not know, who seemed interested in motoring and told me with a wealth of unintelligible detail all about a long tour he had lately taken through some of the most charming parts of England. But he was not concerned with either the landscape or the antiquities, only with the daily life and sufferings of his car, and the difficulty of diagnosing its symptoms. He had been, he said, through Broadway, and I said enthusiastically that it was one of the most beautiful villages in England. " Oh, yes, it's pretty enough," he replied, " but there's a very steep gradient coming into the town ; and would you believe it, but it was just there that one of the sparking plugs chose to go wrong. I had told my man about it the day before, but of course he forgot to overhaul it ; and

I am one of those old-fashioned people who think that prevention is better than cure! Don't you agree with me about that?"

"Why, yes," I said, "it's better to have a fence at the top of the cliff than an ambulance at the bottom!" "Oh, I didn't mean it was as steep as *that*," he said reassuringly; "and after all we got on to Evesham all right." I interjected something about the beauty of the orchards, to which he said, "Oh, yes, it's pretty enough—but you don't have much chance of seeing what it's like, when you are afraid any minute that a sparking plug is going wrong."

I felt somehow that it was hardly worth while making serious incursions into this elderly gentleman's mind; so I sat still and unfurled a sort of mental umbrella, off which his talk trickled like rain. When we came up into the drawing-room, the women were in possession of the chairs, and the men tended to stand about in groups at the door, eyeing the ladies fiercely, and to continue the important conversations which had been begun in the dining-room. I heard my old friend repeating his views on sparking plugs to a mild-looking clergyman who shook his head sympathetically, and sighed deeply at intervals. I was whisked off and introduced to a young married lady on a sofa—I concluded that she was still in the early days of her wifehood, so mutely and discouragingly she looked past my best talk and nimblest gesticulations to a commonplace gentleman who was making himself very agreeable on a sofa to two young ladies.

And then suddenly the end drew near; a carriage was announced and then another; the host and

hostess were surrounded by eager groups of guests endeavouring pathetically to throw into their farewells a reminiscence of social pleasure which they had not felt, with all the geniality which comes from the sight of the haven under the hill ; and presently I drifted away with my party, and chattered in the swift noiseless brougham with the joy which comes of a great danger escaped, a weary passage successfully surmounted.

What had it all been about ? What was the meaning of all this elaborate pageant, made possible only by much silent drudgery in the background ? I shuddered to think of all the agencies of dumb human labour which had been called into play for the sake of a ceremony which had frankly to most of those present been tedious rather than refreshing. And yet it had not resulted in my having really, in any sense worth having, drawn nearer to any human being. I had neither received nor imparted any fact, fancy, or principle worth a moment's consideration. I had not loved or admired or enjoyed or been amused by any one of my companions. I had a dumb sense of human kindness somewhere about, a dull gratitude for anxious care and unnecessary expense ; and I began to feel what a barbarous thing it was for more than half a dozen people to sit down to anything so intimate and even sacred as a friendly meal. If we had given ourselves away, recognised the presence of emotion or interest or delight, evoked or bestowed any sympathy, it would have been different. But we had all been encased in social armour, and had just tilted together like well-bred and hostile knights at a joust or tourney.

We had gone on our way more involved in our own concerns than ever, and more intolerant of interruption or invasion. The meal, instead of being a sacrament of love, had been merely an enforcement of isolation and aloofness. We had escaped, for all our smiles and bows, like dogs from a snarling encounter, with a dim fear that our bones might be appropriated and our domains intruded upon.

Well, perhaps that was not quite all. Some little sediment of human combination was left at the bottom of the cup ; we had learned a little toleration, and gained perhaps a touch of humility, measuring our own inability to attract, to charm, to infuse good-fellowship into the scene. *Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit !* We had a common memory and mutual experience. But I felt the dreary fruitlessness of it all. It seemed to me that the only excuse for all this show and costliness would have been if it had enabled us to join hands and to exchange smiles of welcome, but that if we had not done this, the time so allotted should have been spent in extending our relations with the few whom we really did trust and love. Thus the matter must rest, with a helpless sense of being feebly borned by mean conventions, and yet being unable to reject them or to triumph over them—just as a man who desires to sleep is kept awake by the nibbling of some small rodent under the wainscot of his bedroom. To think better of humanity ought to be the end of our social combinations, but the end attained seems to be ostentation, and cold judgment, and the emphasising of our solitariness and our mistrust.

XXVIII

THE INAUGURATION

WHY does one go to such gatherings ? It must be some very primitive instinct ! A feeling that if many people are met together, and men of wisdom address them persuasively and courteously, there *must* be some resulting advantage behind, some thoughts to be stored away like apples in a garret, some phrases to be relished. Perhaps the great card of invitation has something to do with it, the gold shield imprinted, and the fine names rehearsed, and the honour of one's company requested—there is someone then who feels one's presence to be an honour ; he must certainly be identified and gratified. Or perhaps is it merely the herd-instinct ?

I hurried back early from a walk ; the country was beautiful, fresh and sweet-smelling. Apple trees were white with bloom, new grass upspringing, cuckoos gliding grey along the hedges, birds calling and answering, clouds racing over a blue sky. Never mind ! There are words of wisdom to be heard, friends to smile at, it will be nice to feel that one is singled out for the honour of being asked. One can see the country any day !

Soon, in my least comfortable clothes, I was pushing up the steps ; everyone seemed indignant

with everyone else for crowding in, for being there at all ; faces were drawn up into anxious frowns. Then I was at the top, and there was a corridor, with a well-dressed smiling lady shaking hands. "Such a comfort you have got such a nice day," said an old stout man with stiff, up-standing grey hair, to the lady. "Yes, isn't it a comfort? . . . Yes, how do you do? . . . Yes (to me), how do you do? Yes, anywhere here!" "Well, you have got a good day for your show", said a tall thin man, with a melancholy smile. "Yes, isn't it a comfort? How do you do? Yes, anywhere here." I went into the big room, rather bleak-looking, with fresh white plaster and a smell of new-cut wood. It was fast filling up, and there were no chairs vacant. A weary-looking, rather tousled man, in a gown, came forward. "How do you do? Glad to see you! No, I am afraid there are no seats vacant here, except a few we are keeping for Sir John's party. If you will go out into the corridor again, and turn to the left, there is another door, and there will be some chairs there. Oh, no trouble at all—very glad to see you." I went out by the door by which I had entered. A little meagre man with a long moustache was saying to the lady as I passed, "Well, anyhow it might have been a rainy day." "Yes, we are very lucky," said the lady.

At this point I passed two of my acquaintances. "What, looking for a seat?" said the husband, a brisk eager-looking man. "Well, we are lucky in our weather!" I said. "We are indeed!" said the wife with an intense smile. I reached the other door at last, where a pompous man was

issuing directions. "Yes, not that chair, please—that is reserved. I think there are some chairs further down there." His elbow was nudged by a meek ingratiating man, who said, "Any seats hereabouts?" adding, "I was just saying to Mrs. Bell how lucky we were in our weather!" At last I found a little wooden stool against the wall and sat down, nodding to some of my friends whom I saw in the crowd. How pleasant, I thought, to be here after all!

Suddenly everyone looked in one direction, and there was a clapping of hands. A big white-bearded man appeared, and walked with a determined air to a small platform with a table and seats, after him came a little man nodding and smiling in all directions, followed by a third, whose brow was furrowed with care, and who looked as though he would rather be anywhere than where he was. The three sat down, conferred together, and a hush fell on the whole assembly.

Presently the little man rose, amid loud applause, and said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the purpose of our assembling to-day is well-known to us all, and I need not further dilate on a topic which will soon be handled with more eloquence than I can command." "No, no!" said two bulky men sitting just below the platform. The orator bowed and smiled, and then continued: "We have the honour, Ladies and Gentlemen, to welcome here Sir John Satticombe, whose distinguished career and eminent qualities are too well-known to make it necessary for me to . . . to dilate further on this topic. With the history of the bequest that has made our expansion possible—a bequest, I

may add, of noble and pre-eminent munificence—we are already too familiar for me to waste your . . . your valuable time in further dilating about it. Ladies and Gentlemen, I will not delay you longer, I will only ask Sir John to perform the gratifying task of declaring this Lecture-Hall open.”

There was a half-hearted attempt at applause, and at that moment a sharp-faced lady in spectacles just in front of me said in her husband's ear, “ I hope somebody is going to dilate soon ! ” “ Sh—, dear,” said her husband, and at that moment the applause suddenly swelled out and was cut off short, as the ample and benevolent form of Sir John rose in his place and bowed with gravity left and right.

“ Ladies and Gentlemen,” he said in a great booming voice which appeared to buzz and echo in a curious way through the hall, “ Mr. Prentis has so eloquently described the purpose of our meeting here to-day, and in memorable words has so movingly expressed the munificence of the bequest to which we owe ”—here he waved a large flat hand before him as if he were serving at lawn-tennis—“ the noble building in which we are assembled, that I need hardly attempt to deal with it in my own less gifted fashion.” Here the stout gentleman under the platform again said, “ No, no ! ”

Sir John bowed and continued. “ To one observation, however, which fell from our eloquent chairman, I am bound in all modesty to demur—I refer to the moving words in which he voiced a recognition of my humble services to education

—I need not dilate upon them—in a manner altogether . . . superior to my deserts.”

The stout man at this cried out, “No, no!” again, as if responding to a litany; and the sharp-faced woman in front of me said to her husband, “Isn’t *anyone* going to tell us *anything* about *anything*?” “On this subject,” continued Sir John, “I beg leave to be silent. It is not for me to reject such testimony; and I may say that the present moment is, without any exception, the most gratifying moment of a career which, however humble, may at least claim to be devoted. But upon myself I will no longer dilate, except to observe that though I cannot concur with the generous encomium pronounced upon my humble services in the cause of education, yet I will dare to claim that they have been dictated by a heartfelt desire for the welfare of our fellow-men.” (Applause). “More than this I will not say. I will only observe that if I have done anything to advance the cause of education, I have done so without any ambition other than that of securing for our fellow-citizens what I will venture to call an equal opportunity. But you will forgive me if I say that much as I value the all too generous recognition by the chairman of my services, my motive throughout has been, as a well-known writer says, to deserve success rather than to desire it. Henceforth on this topic my lips are sealed. I will only point out that the efforts to which the chairman has done me the honour to allude will be as freely at the service of the community in the future as they have been in the past.” (Applause followed, during which my neighbour said, “Isn’t

anyone going to tell us what he has done?") "I will now perform the highly congenial and, if I may say so, honourable task of declaring the Lecture-Hall open. Once more may I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, with reference to the kind but undeserved words which fell from your chairman about what he so generously calls the services I have done to education, that if my help is again needed in these directions, I shall not be wanting. Those services, as he is good enough to designate them, have been, are, and ever will be devoted to the interests of the community."

This elegant and illuminating speech over, Sir John was conducted with much ceremony to the door by which he had entered the room, and by which I had been ejected, and gingerly applied a gold key, pressed into his hand by the chairman, to its corresponding orifice. The key, however, refused to turn, and after some painful suspense a heavily built man stepped forward with an ordinary key, by means of which, aided by a push of some violence delivered with his shoulder, the door was forced open, and prolonged applause followed. Sir John then said, "I declare this Hall to be open." Whereupon my neighbour said, "It has been in use *to my certain knowledge* for six months. However, we may be thankful we were not all locked in for ever."

Sir John and Mr. Prentis then returned to the platform, and the third man, with the tortured air, rose in his place, and said, "Mr. Chairman, Sir John Satticombe, Ladies and Gentlemen, I will borrow a moving phrase from Sir John's eloquent speech, and say that the congenial task now

devolves upon me to express the heartfelt thanks of this great assembly to Sir John for performing this highly impressive ceremony. It would ill become me to do this without alluding to a topic of which Sir John, if I may use a well-known phrase, has decidedly 'fought shy.' He has demurred with characteristic modesty to any mention of the eminent services which he has performed in the cause of education, and he has done this so emphatically—"and so continuously," said my neighbour,—“that I will do no more than allude to services which are so well-known to all who are here assembled, that they need no further endorsement from a speaker as unpractised as myself. We thank Sir John for the inspiring words which are still ringing in our ears, we thank him for his still more eloquent example; and if I may say so with reverence, we thank God for such men as Sir John, to direct, sustain, and purify, by services, on which he would not wish me to dwell further, devoted to the great cause, the nature of which is too well-known to those present to need any explanation from me. Ladies and gentlemen, I call for three cheers for Sir John, and I will add, God bless him ! ”

The audience all rose to their feet, and there was prolonged applause. Sir John remained standing, and said that he had been so deeply moved by the welcome he had received that he could hardly receive it even with outward signs of composure. “On the main purpose of our assembly here, I will not further dilate,” he said. “Well, I did think we were going to get at *one* fact,” said my neighbour, to which her husband, a pale impassive-

looking man said, " We know at all events how modest Sir John is."

Sir John then briefly alluded to his services in the cause of education, and demurred to the recognition expressed of them by the chairman as being " unduly generous," a statement received with prolonged applause, after which the dignitaries went out and the meeting dispersed.

I hurried down to the front entrance to see Sir John's departure. I thought I should feel happier if I knew he was far away. He was shaking hands with Mr. Prentis, by the open door of an elegant car, and I heard him say something about his services to education. He entered the car and drove away, and Mr. Prentis then said to the lady who had received me and was standing by, " Well, anyhow the rain has kept off." While a cheerful roseate man, passing out with two ladies, cried out loudly, " Well, Prentis, Sir John was in fine form, and you too—and what splendid weather for your show ! "

XXIX

ROBES AND CEREMONIES

A SHORT time ago I attended as one of a deputation to give a formal welcome to a Judge of Assize. We passed through a panelled ante-room, paved with black and white marble ; here stood various functionaries with a certain solemnity of mien which betrayed to me the fact that, like myself, they were feeling slightly as though they were to be tried for their life,—the Mayor with his great enamelled jewel, councillors in red furred gowns, gentlemen in velvet court suits, with lace falls and metal buttons, a Sheriff in a plumed cocked hat and a scarlet coat with epaulets, all visibly touched by the finger of anxiety. We advanced to folding-doors, which were thrown open. There, at the end of another panelled chamber, hung round with portraits, His Lordship stood with an official or two. He was a very awe-inspiring sight, in his red robe and cape trimmed with ermine and the grizzled pendent wig, his grave fresh-coloured face composed to a sphinx-like immobility as though he weighed everything.

I advanced to make my bow. The gravity melted into a smile ; he advanced with extended hand ; and I recognised a contemporary fellow-under-

graduate of my own, and in the old Cambridge days a frequent companion.

"Well, certainly you look very magnificent!" I said in a respectful tone.

"Do I?" he said; "that's all right! Depend upon it it's a great mistake to underrate costume. Ripped out like this, I feel equal to anything. I could go anywhere, say anything, do anything. It is very sustaining. But when down in the country I go in my ordinary coat to the magistrates' bench, I feel ignorant of law, devoid of all *savoir-faire*, inclined to apologise to everyone."

The dignitaries wondered to see us talk and laugh together; but it was a levée with no time to loiter. We bowed and I passed on.

I never wholly believe a man who says that he does not like dressing-up. I believe it to be an instinct deeply and universally implanted in the human mind. I saw the other day a picture of a group of hideous aborigines, whose adornment consisted of curious lines and patches of white wool attached to their persons by some species of glue, making them at once ridiculous and terrifying; scrutinising the faces, I could trace in them exactly the same emotions that I recognise in myself on such occasions; a self-conscious dignity half proud, half rueful, a sense of not trusting in one's own strength. One feels that there is a part to play, a function to perform; but it is a curiously isolated experience, for one does not take any interest except a slightly derisive one in any other person similarly attired. The prevailing sensation is that expressed by the verse of the Psalm:—
"The earth is weak and all the inhabitants thereof;

I bear up the pillars of it." In fact, one feels both sustained and sustaining.

That is the view insensibly adopted by one who is inside the function. When one is a mere gazer, the mind becomes curiously absorbed, and one seems to have no time for anything but a respectful contemplation. The mind is greedy of wonder and astonishment. I once maintained to a friend that if we were to array ourselves in green cloaks with high green pointed hats, and stride together through a town at a solemn pace, he carrying a brazen trumpet, and I a large sheet of parchment, halting at intervals for him to blow a blast on the trumpet and for me to read unintelligible words from the parchment, we should be sure of a respectful and curious audience. I see no reason to doubt it.

I was once present on a day of state in the hall of my City Company—let us call it the Hatters' Company. In the vestibule there were congregated a number of men in red gowns frogged with blue, bearing silver or black wands with the figures of birds, or pomegranates, or hearts at the top, in silver, a clergyman in full canonicals, a man with a red robe faced with black velvet, and several men in blue gowns, wearing large adumbrating hats, with silver badges. From the inner vestibule came out a gentleman attired in a gown of purple flowered silk, edged with brown fur, and a chain of office, carrying in his hand an enormous bouquet and wearing an ordinary silk hat. A dozen similar figures followed him. A signal was given, and a long procession was formed. It passed down the steps and into the

street ; the police kept back a considerable crowd, which manifested a distinct impulse to remove their hats. The procession wound slowly across the road, and turned into a lane which led to a great silvery white Wren church, of which the spire was visible above the houses.

As the crowd dispersed two foreigners darted up to me, where I stood on the steps, and implored to know the meaning of the ceremony. I replied that it was the Hatters' Company going to hear a sermon in the Church of St. Alpheus Strangeways. At which they bowed, looked at each other, and as they went down the steps I heard one say to the other, that the English were all quite mad. It might well have seemed so. But there was not a man in the procession who did not move proudly and gallantly, conscious of high worth and dignity.

That is the corporate effect of a ceremony : now for the effect on the individual.

I once represented my University at the presentation of a formal address to the King. It took place at St. James's Palace. In an ante-room crowds of similar bodies were seen hounded into little scarlet-railed pens, jealously guarded by impressive ushers. Among these I particularly remember a pen tenanted by Quakers in ordinary morning dress, by royal favour, and pitied them.

The actual scene of the presentation was very dignified. We advanced with unwonted humility up a great room, which in my memory was all gold and crimson silk, between rows of busbied red-coated guardsmen. A crowd of royal personages were on the dais. The Home Secretary handed His Majesty a parchment. The King's trim well-

built figure, facing the crowd majestically, and his rich resonant voice as he read a reply was highly authoritative, and we dispersed, shuffling backwards.

A large crowd had assembled outside ; and the egress of group after group of singularly attired courtiers caused much interest. Among our own party was a man who had an innocent zeal for publicity. He was clad in velvet levée dress with a scarlet gown and a large black velvet bonnet, with a gold cord.

He stepped alone into Pall Mall, and was greeted with a burst of applause. At this testimony to his greatness, the devil must have entered into his heart. He saw before him the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them, Pall Mall guarded by police, the crowd held back, and the long open highway before him. " If they like to see me, they shall," he must have said to himself, and he began to proceed at a slow stage-walk, throwing out one shapely silken leg and then the other in front of him and bringing it down very nearly in the same place, so that his progress was measured by inches. The crowd cheered at intervals. I myself went with a friend into an adjacent club ; but when we came out, twenty minutes later, our friend was still continuing his march down Pall Mall, not very far away, throwing out his legs alternately and bringing them down, an infinite satisfaction written large all over his portly form.

At such moments as these the mind in its head-strong vanity is incapable of observation ; laughter and derision only increase the sense of self-consecration and importance. The physical deficien-

cies of which most of us are conscious enough on ordinary social occasions are ingeniously interpreted. The stout man becomes stately, the shrivelled man ascetic, the rubicund man kindly, the pale man interesting. But on the other hand it is like an intoxication and deserts one suddenly. One is instantaneously aware of being a fatigued and tawdry Guy posturing absurdly in a meaningless pageant. The emptiness of human triumphs is revealed to the soul, the pettiness of public glory. One would like to shed tears, to be covered up with shawls and plaids, to tear off one's childish bedizenment.

I remember how my subconscious mind gave me a lesson once in this respect. I have often had dreams of great ceremonies, but my own part in them is generally cut short by sudden fallings from me, vanishings—I cannot find the raised desk to which I am tending, I am overtaken by instantaneous nudities. But on this occasion I took my part in a vast procession, in a great ancient town, full of high carved house-fronts and quaint towers. I was arrayed in a salmon-coloured robe, and with a fanfare of trumpets the procession started two and two. I was then seized with the idea that I would pose for the benefit of spectators, as a very ancient and hampered scholar, lost in learned reveries and totally unconscious of my surroundings. I bowed my head, kept my eyes fixed on the ground, and walked with a limp and slightly tottering step. I was filled with increasing satisfaction, until I suddenly became aware that my official companion was no longer at my side, and looking up found that I had played my rôle

with such success, that I had fallen behind the procession altogether, and though I could see a street of immense length ahead of me, the procession had entirely disappeared, while all the spectators in sight were in agonies of irrepressible laughter. With what restored agility I tore off my robes and leapt away can hardly be described. My mind had revenged itself on its own fatuity indeed.

The highest art of the processional manner is very rarely attained; and that is to take part with an entire but kindly indifference. I have seen this carried to excess by a cardinal at Palermo, who came to the Cathedral under a scarlet umbrella, a very venerable and worn old man, profoundly inattentive, who was seized upon and habited in a black enveloping robe and cowl, without any will of his own, and who then, as he walked up the nave, expectorated with faultless art between the reverent onlookers.

I have seen it attained by an actor representing a Pope, who came in with a gliding motion and eyes fixed on vacancy, through a group of kneeling persons who caught his hand as it dangled at his side when he passed and kissed his ring. A restless actor would have smiled and blessed. But he took absolutely no notice at all, as though it were too familiar a phenomenon to be considered. I have also seen it achieved at a procession at Windsor, when the late Lord Salisbury, a bulky figure, with the Garter ribbon, shuffled along in a great pomp with an air of infinite melancholy and discontent.

But as a rule the normal and wholesome instinct is to rejoice and be glad at a little bit of the glory

and worship that falls so rarely to human beings. Dean Hook of Chichester, who was accustomed to comment audibly and jerkily, unconsciously revealing his secret thoughts on public occasions, was heard by a friend of mine, as a procession moved out of the vestry into the aisle, with the organ clamouring and thundering, to murmur, "Here we go, here we go!" in accents of unalloyed satisfaction.

XXX

PUBLIC SPEAKING

I HAVE had of late to listen to a good deal of public speaking, and the list of speakers whom I have heard contains some men of first-rate eminence, and a good many men who, if not exactly eminent, hold a high public position—indeed, I may say that I believe that on the whole I have heard a good selection of English oratory.

The reluctant conclusion which I have come to is that the great majority of these speeches have been performances of very low intellectual and artistic quality. Intellectually, only one or two showed any real sign of order or sequence. A speech ought to be the presentment of a case : it ought to work from point to point up to a clearly foreseen conclusion. The beginning should be dry and simple, indicating the ground that the speaker intends to cover. The solid statement or argument should come early, before attention begins to wander. This should then be expanded and expounded in an easier manner, the audience taken more into confidence ; and in this section of the speech should come illustrations and strokes of humour, tempting the listeners to revive their flagging interest. But even so the good things

should be spaced out. Time is required for the digestion of a story or a jest or a pungent maxim before another comes along. And then, having won the delighted attention of the audience—and it is easy to see when this has been achieved by the eager and expectant expression of the hearers' faces—the speaker may cautiously advance to the emotional part of the speech, which should be short and moving without being sentimental—indeed, for an effective speech irony should seldom be far away. The conclusion should be sharp and clear, and the most emphatic point in the whole speech.

Artistically, the first of all requisites is that the speaker should be or seem to be at ease. He must not begin hurriedly or guiltily, because the tranquillity of the speaker is the first requisite for the enjoyment of the audience; and thus a speech should begin deliberately and with a friendly air, which at the same time must arouse expectation. A speaker may indeed wait at the beginning of his speech as long as he dares, that the audience may get used to him. It is the timid and nervous speaker that takes a header into his subject.

Now how did most of the speeches that I heard conform to these canons? Hardly at all. One very eminent man, a great lawyer, did it to perfection. He began in an unhurried way and with a friendly smile. He indulged in a few gestures—an important thing, if possible, for a statuesque pose and an oracular manner tend rather to hypnotise an audience. Then he brought out his toughest bit of argument; many of his

hearers did not understand this or listen to it, but they were not yet tired of their curiosity to see and hear so famous a man. Then he dropped into a more conversational tone and did a little rapid biography; and at the end he rose into an impassioned vein and spoke of the profound significance of the cause he was urging. It was here that he did not quite manage to carry his audience away, for lack of the sacred fire—but it was a dignified, beautiful and moving speech, though perhaps in parts a little too much like a lecture.

Then there was a short speech which of its kind was perfect. An admiral had just spoken, a breezy and unconsidered utterance which pleased just by its good-nature and artless common sense. The admiral was followed by an eminent scholar, who is also, it may be said, a bon-vivant, very gregarious and convivial. His face gleamed with good cheer through a mist of cigar-smoke, like a danger signal on a foggy night. He beamed through his spectacles, and said that it was all very well for an admiral, a man of proved courage and daring, to come and talk as if he were on his own quarter-deck. But what sort of an ordeal, he asked us, was it for a pale scholar (laughter) dragged reluctant and protesting from his books (great laughter) to come and bandy words with men ripened into fearlessness by the loud wind and the plunging sea.

By this time he had taken the audience entirely captive. He then made his points rapidly and clearly, and ended by saying what a relief it was to him to retire again to his refined and placid seclusion.

A more brilliant speech than either of these was that of a young and comparatively unknown man who had to propose the guests, and did so in a series of brilliant epigrams. The material of this was excellent and the manner restrained ; but it was too full of plums, and a good many were missed, simply because an average audience cannot manœuvre its mind with sufficient rapidity.

Another speaker to whom I listened several times was a man who by his position is bound to appear constantly in public. His speeches, which were very short, were admirable. He made a single point, aptly summarising the purpose of the gathering ; he told a single story, very humorous and illustrative ; and he indulged in ironical, almost impudent criticisms of one or two of the most important guests. This, which requires much delicacy of handling, is a very successful stroke : the audience like to see a great personage made respectful fun of and the victim regards it in the light of a compliment.

But now to take some of the unsuccessful ones. The worst, without any doubt, was made by the most eminent man of all. He seemed wholly at his ease and full of goodwill and understanding. But he simply had not prepared his speech. He said the same thing over and over again hardly varying the language, he paused, he shamelessly and insouciantly consulted notes. Where he failed, as most speakers fail, was not in his points but in his connections. The difficult thing in a speech is not the central message, but the deft way in which a speaker glides from one section to another. Let me quote a sentence which I committed to

memory. It was at the opening of an exhibition, and some technical exhibits had been collected in one room. "It has been suggested," this speaker said, "that before we leave the building we should glance at certain technical drawings of which we might not perhaps understand the full significance and purport, but which illustrate the character of the studies which this library is intended to assist to such a high degree that we shall feel, I am sure, that in glancing at them . . . we shall have set our eyes upon something which will . . . er . . . provide us with evidence of the value of these studies or at least convince us that the sketches themselves . . . are, in fact . . . er . . . very well worth glancing at."

Yet so easy and dignified was his speaking manner, so indulgent his smile that I do not believe that nine-tenths of his audience were aware of the amazing futility of the sentence.

But most of the unsuccessful speeches I heard were speeches obviously unprepared. The speakers had, I thought, probably just jotted down a few points, which they blurted out without any arrangement and then seemed stupefied to find how short a time they had occupied. The remainder of these speeches consisted of vain and broken repetitions, which reminded one of a cow meekly chewing her cud as if to show how conscientious her daily meal had been.

Some that I heard were carefully prepared, but simply dull: the dullest was an after-dinner speech which would have done excellently as the opening speech of a chairman at a committee. But as the old proverb says, "after the banquet the minstrel,"

and no after-dinner speech is tolerable which does not either interest or amuse.

Some speakers were afflicted by a pure inability to stop. That is only too unhappily likely to attack a speaker who has no gifts but is gratified at being asked to address the audience. He gets over his first tremors, he works through the agonising surprise which the first sound of one's voice gives one, a voice which seems to come from so far away and to be so strangely transformed and weakened. Then the pleasure of publicity and performance seizes on him—what had he been afraid of? It is easy enough. It is; it is lamentably easy to string together pointless sentences.

Others, again, would stop if they could. You see their sad and rolling eyes entreating for help; but they cannot wind up—they can frame no epigrammatic ending, and they wait for it to fall from the sky. There were one or two quite complete failures, men who had been too frightened even to prepare and had trusted to that most freakish and treacherous of all guardians, the inspiration of the moment, not unaided by wine.

But I came to the conclusion that what Emerson says is true, that the English take a pride in speaking badly in public, as if to show that they do not live by their tongues. They would rather be thought faltering amateurs than glib professionals. Many men value the compliment of being asked to speak, hate the idea of it, and let it look after itself.

This is, I feel, very reprehensible. No one has

any business to accept the responsibility of a public performance unless he is prepared to instruct or amuse—for a really bad speech is a pain both to speaker and listeners, and a sad recollection in early waking hours for the man who has failed.

As I have spoken so critically, I will relate what my own practice is, for I have not unfrequently to make a speech, and have no natural gift for extempore speaking; in fact, to be called upon suddenly and unexpectedly for a speech means in my case total disgrace and failure. I take trouble about speeches—jot down anything which occurs to me in a leisurely hour, weave it into a logical structure, and have it typewritten on small sheets of paper which can be held in the hand together with a menu. The fact that I have my speech in my pocket entirely relieves me of nervousness, and I can talk and enjoy my dinner up to the last. Then I get the speech out and try to do without the MS. as far as possible. A story or a definite point is easy enough, but I generally help myself out with the transitions; and meanwhile I look as little at my speech and as much at my audience as I can. I do not say that this is always successful, but I know the pleasant sensation of having the audience in the net and realising that they will respond to the variations of one's mood.

It is, of course, certain that a speech spoken is always fresher and more convincing than a speech read. Most people have a reading voice of a monotonous kind, with the pace of a slowly trotting horse, which forfeits all natural emphasis and becomes a mere piece of intoning.

Of course I don't consider my plan to result in oratory at all. But I dislike making a fool of myself in public and I am willing to take a good deal of trouble to avoid this, and my wonder is that, considering the terror of speaking, more people do not take that trouble.

There is a story of a Chinese Ambassador dining at the Mansion House and saying that he had never before realised how marked a difference existed in England between the racial types—the florid, vigorous, full-blooded practical type, and the pale, intellectual, anæmic scholarly type. The Lord Mayor, who knew that most of the guests were eminent bankers or aldermen, was much puzzled. A list was sent for: the Ambassador pointed out specimens of the anæmic type, and it was discovered that they were the gentlemen who had been entrusted with the task of making speeches after dinner.

Many competent and even great speakers suffer, I believe, from this nervousness. My brother, Monsignor Benson, who was a well-known and successful preacher, and who for a good many years preached, I suppose, as many as two hundred sermons a year, told me that he spent his half-hour before the sermon—the preacher in Roman Catholic churches generally remains in the vestry—in agonies of nervousness in chair or on a sofa, and was frequently actually and physically sick. No amount of practice, he said, ever made the least difference to this acute nerve-prostration.

Yet when all is said and done, it is the nervous temperament which produces oratory; the pedes-

trian speaker may persuade, instruct, console, even amuse. He may have as weighty a message as his neurotic colleague, he may believe in its importance just as or even more strongly. But the real oration is a sort of magic—it wakens far-off and mysterious suggestions, it hints more than it discloses, it pierces hearts with darts that throb and rankle, it terrifies, it overpowers, it throws spells into the air.

XXXI

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

THE train was very crowded ; and I dived into a smoking carriage, where there were already three men, and one vacant corner seat. I had a very busy day before me in London, and I carried with me a new book, which I had undertaken to review, and to which I proposed to devote a quiet hour and a half in the train.

To my left was a ruddy man of bluff aspect, perhaps a small country squire, I thought ; opposite him was a tall, pale handsome man with a pleasant expression and a slightly deferential air, very precisely dressed—a solicitor, I conjectured. The third man was very neatly attired and wore an immense bouquet of what seemed to be sweet-peas in his button-hole. He had a supercilious air, and I could imagine that twenty years ago his friends had told him he was good-looking, a fact which they had as certainly by now forgotten, as he obviously had not.

I had hardly read half a page, the train having started, when the burly man said to the solicitor in a tone of deep conviction, “ I *can't* understand this Government. They seem to be heading straight for destruction, eh ? ” “ Yes, indeed,” said the

solicitor. "You are right there. Straight for destruction—that's just the right expression. Destruction for the country, destruction for their own party, destruction for . . . well, for most things. And going into it open-eyed, knowing well what is ahead of them. I am afraid that Ramsay—as they call him—is a much less clever man than we had been led to suppose!" He looked about him with an air of finality.

"Clever, yes!" said the burly man. "Clever, I grant you that! But we don't want cleverness now; we have had quite enough of that! What we need is common sense and a little backbone."

"Yes, indeed," said the solicitor, "common sense and backbone—you put the case in a nutshell—admirably put!" He turned to the man with the bouquet, and in an ingratiating way said, "And what do you think?"

The man with the flowers was reading his paper, and did not wish to be disturbed. "Think?" he said pertly. "I *don't* think—it's not my line. I leave that to the unemployed! I've no time for thinking."

The solicitor turned to the bluff man. "He will have his joke!" he said admiringly.

"I'm not sure that he isn't right!" said the burly one. "What good does thinking do? It's think, think, think, and there it stops! Give me *doing*!"

"That's right!" said the solicitor. "My old father used to say—he had a lot of quaint old sayings—'a pinch of doing is worth a pound of thinking!'" "And very sensible too!" said the burly man, "but tell me, was your father by

any chance a snuff-taker?" "He was," said the solicitor, "what made you think of that?"

"Why, you see, he spoke of 'a pinch,' you said. I said to myself, 'Why a pinch? There's snuff behind that somewhere!'"

"Uncommonly sharp!" said the solicitor. "How you see through things! Rather like Sherlock Holmes, it seems to me."

A quarter of an hour had now passed; up to this point I had enjoyed the dialogue. It was not that the subject-matter was new or the criticism profound. But there was a thoroughness about the process of thought revealed—no quick transitions, no gaps unfilled, nothing left to the imagination. Then, too, the bluff man's voice was a powerful organ, and contained an extraordinary volume of sound. His articulation was precise, and he would have been as easily audible to a thousand persons in a large hall, as he was to the solicitor and myself. The solicitor's voice was a penetrating voice too. But now I thought I should like to read my book.

But I was not to be allowed to do that. The solicitor said brightly after a moment's pause, "I'm going up to meet my kiddy to-day—coming home from school, you know. It's a tiptop school. Miss Baker's at Worthing—a very healthy air! They pay great attention to health there. That's the first consideration to my mind." He was preparing to expand this statement, when the burly man said firmly, "My kiddy comes home on Monday. She's as sharp as they make them. What do you think? She has found out a station on the line short of Norwich, and she says she wants

the car to meet her there instead of Norwich. She says she gets so tired of the train. What do you think of that? pretty well up-to-date, eh?"

"She isn't exactly sharp," said the solicitor, "she isn't quick at her books, and she hasn't made much of the games as yet. But Miss Baker says it's marvellous how she has picked up the tone."

"She wrote to me the other day," said the burly man, "and said I must come down to the Gymnastic Display. Or rather she wrote to her mother and said, 'Daddy must come; he will see plenty of legs!' Marvellous how she picks up things—sharp as a needle. I dare say it was something she had heard me say, in joke, of course."

"She isn't exactly shy," said the solicitor, "she never loses her head and she won't give herself away—we had Holmes in the other day and he started asking her what the moon was made of—the sort of things that amuse children, you know; but she wasn't going to be drawn. She just sat there shaking her head and looking as wise as wise."

"She has a lot of spirit," said the burly man. "She always wants to join in the talk. We had old—what is his name? my memory's getting shocking for names—the parson down at Elmingham, you know, who takes twenty minutes to get out the simplest thing—and what do you think she said? When he came to a stop, she said across the table to me, 'Please I want to talk a little now.' I couldn't help laughing, of course, and there we were."

"She takes after her mother," said the solicitor.

"No, indeed she don't," said the burly man ;
"it's me she favours, as they say."

The solicitor considered it more prudent not to attempt to disentangle the conversation. The man with the nosegay intervened.

"Well, you fellows *can* keep it up," he said.
"I haven't the spirits, let alone the voice, to talk in the train !"

"A train's a good place to talk in," said the burly man. "It seems to keep one's ideas going ; and it saves the eyes too. I can't understand how people can read in a train. I've enjoyed our chat this morning."

I longed to tell him that I had done so too ; I had not read a page of my book, but I felt that I had had my money's worth. I wondered faintly what they would have done if I had read my book aloud at the top of my voice, and said that a train was a good place to read aloud in. I don't think they would have objected ; indeed I do not think they would even have heard !

XXXII

TALK

Nor long ago at Cambridge, owing to a combination of circumstances, visitors staying in my house, guests, entertainments, callers, I spent the whole of a day—it was a Sunday—in talk, with the exception of an hour at Matins. I talked, or listened to talk, from nine in the morning until midnight, that is to say fourteen hours. At no point in the day would it have been courteous, or even possible, to rise and go away, and it would have been even less courteous to have said what I felt, namely that I was in a condition at last of mental nausea and surfeit. I remembered the old story of Carlyle, who after being subjected for some hours to the brilliant rhapsodies of some great monologist like Macaulay, cried out lamentably in a silence, “For God’s sake, take me away and put me in a room by myself, and give me a pipe of tobacco.” I remembered, too, Carlyle’s memorable words about the talk of Coleridge, that to sit still and be pumped into could never be an exhilarating process. Long before the day was over, I felt that I would have given a pound for an hour of silence, with or without a book. Yet the talk to which I listened was not anything of the nature of soliloquy. It

was animated, interesting, amusing talk. Four or five of the people who took part in it were really first-rate talkers,—dramatic, candid, interesting men, quite ready to listen to questions, comments, arguments, criticisms and to answer fairly and justly. There was plenty of gossip going, and the conversation of the day included two or three really good animated discussions on stimulating subjects. But I felt before the end of it that there was no subject in heaven or earth which I ever desired to hear mentioned by human lips again. The worst of it was that I really do enormously enjoy good talk in moderation. But it seems to me a really exhausting thing, like a game or a meal; a thing which is delightful, if one is fresh and has an appetite. But after a couple of hours of good talk, I want to do something else, put my mind in a different posture, use another bit of my brain; and to continue talk when one has had enough is as insupportable as beginning dinner again the moment one has finished dessert. It is easier, of course, if one is content to sit still and hear other people talk; but I either want to join in it myself, or else I want to hear a subject thoroughly discussed; it is the desultory shifting of talk from subject to subject which is so exhausting. And then there comes upon me an extreme physical restlessness; it is terrible to sit in one's chair and say to oneself, "So-and-so will soon be going; and then So-and-so has promised to look in; and he will bring So-and-so; and this stream of words will continue flowing and I, as host, must sit here and take some part in it all."

And then one of my callers was a bore ; and I had to listen to long accounts of travel in places which I did not know, described by a man with no gift of picturesque expression, and to add appropriate comments. That was the darkest hour of my nightmare day ! But I may say that all the other talkers were people with whom it is a real and lively pleasure to exchange words and ideas ; and what made it so rueful a business was to feel at intervals all the amusement and pleasure ebbing away in a dreary languor, with but one desire in the mind, to creep, as Carlyle said, into an inverted tub—to

“ Close the ear from sight and sound
Of the busy world around.”

I do not think that everyone feels like this. I have several friends who can sit quite comfortably together all day long and talk, and who are even capable of congratulating themselves upon its being a wet day, so that it is not necessary to go out. There were certain days in the week, when I was a schoolmaster, when one seemed to be teaching or correcting work from early dawn to late at night ; but I don't think that those days were nearly so exhausting as my Cambridge Sunday was.

I confess that I like to have a subject to talk about ; I like to have light thrown upon it from different minds, to see it in varied aspects, to have contrasting points of view displayed. One gets something out of that, and one learns to give weight to the preferences and prejudices of others. That is what I mean by real talk. And then there is a pleasant sort of ambling gossip about events,

doings, news, friends, acquaintances ; that is all very well for a lazy fireside mood ; and I do not at all agree with Wordsworth, when he wrote :

“ I am not one who much or oft delights
To season his fireside with personal talk.”

Talk about abstract ideas is a fine gymnastic, but not to be indulged too freely ; while talk about concrete details is apt to be boring ; one wants a good deal of mere incident and reminiscence to familiarise one with the play and interplay of surrounding life—“ news ” in the simplest sense. I think it is a very poor thing to live in a community and not to know all that is going on in it ; if a man does that, he gets into a state of solemn importance about the value of his own work and the weight of his own opinion ; it is a very good thing to have our acts and words and thoughts sharply contrasted with the performances of others ; we learn humility so, and it is very difficult to be humble in solitude.

But it is the terror of protractedness which mars so many delights. The real thing is to leave off before one has had enough, not to drop off in mere satiety. I remember once hearing two clever women discussing the question of eternity ; one of them said, “ The idea of eternity always frightens me ; it will have to be something very different from mere infinite repetition of existence, however pleasant. Why,” she added, “ there is nothing in the world, dear Mrs. —, that I enjoy more than a talk with you ; but if I thought that it was going on to all eternity, it would wear quite a different aspect ! ”

That is why I think the talk at meal-times is so much more pleasant than talk in solemn and vacuous session. One sees the end of it, the blessed *terminus ad quem*, which is the one condition of all enjoyment. And then, too, it is a relief to have some simultaneous mechanical employment going on ; that takes off the restlessness of the body, and eases the cramped mind. But on the whole the *tête-à-tête*, the dialogue, is the pleasantest sort of talk. Very few people are really deft enough, quick enough, just enough, sympathetic enough to play the game in threes or fours ; the laggard gets left out, the man of swift perceptions outruns the company ; but a *tête-à-tête* is generally interesting. I confess also that one kind of talk interests me greatly, especially if it is not of too common occurrence—and that is a talk with a complete and thorough-paced egotist, who will indulge in luscious self-revelation ; because so one really gets a steady look into the mind of a human being, and an egotist is always, I think, more interesting than a selfless, eagerly sympathetic person, who wishes to draw you out. The kind of man like the Oxford Don who was so impersonal that he used to say, “ Won’t you come in to tea ?—one’s wife would be so glad to see you ”—is not interesting, because he guards his heart and mind too closely.

The two things which surprise me oftenest in human intercourse are first the difficulty which some people experience in giving themselves away, and secondly the fact how poorly many people talk after all the practice they have had.

It is very curious that with all our civilisation

there is yet so strong an instinct in many of us to conceal our true opinions and feelings. The ugly old proverbs about not wearing the heart upon the sleeve, or that, if speech is silver, silence is golden, are relics of a barbarous age, when a man held every man to be his enemy unless he was proved to be a friend. I know men of graceful exterior, polite, reserved, with sparkling eyes, who reduce me to helpless irritation because I feel that I never know what they are thinking. If their thoughts are rich, happy, joyful thoughts, it is shameful that they will not share them; and if they are bitter, sad, disappointed thoughts, for heaven's sake, I feel, let us hear them and try to make things better. But these impersonal people cannot bear to be intruded upon; they think that they will be criticised, their remarks will be quoted against them, counted up to them. That in one of the real shadows of sensitive intelligence, that it cannot bear to be criticised. Of course it is not pleasant to be regarded as a chattering fool, and I do not mean that one wants a weltering cataract of private reflections; one just wants to have mature and well-considered conclusions.

But the difficulty partly comes from the second of my two observations; that so many people do not learn to talk well. It is partly that they do not think it worth the trouble. If they are not disposed to talk, they do not see that they owe others the duty of attempting to do so. To talk reasonably, clearly, frankly, seems to me to be a very high social duty indeed, if social duty has any meaning at all. We cannot consider society as a great heap of convenient things, from which

we are at liberty to filch all we can, without replacing it. The essence of life seems to me to be social relation and mutual understanding. I remember an old Don, a handsome, amiable, cultivated man, who was fond of society in his way, who used to sit at parties, with his great snowy head poised in the air, and his lips tightly compressed as if they were bolted within. The orifice used to be cautiously opened occasionally to admit food and drink, but very seldom to emit sound. He liked to be talked to, and would complain, in the privacy of his home, of the dullness of certain people. But it never occurred to him that he had the smallest responsibility in the matter. He went out to be amused, and he was vexed if he were not amused ; but to condescend to amuse other people was quite beneath his dignity.

Sometimes, when wrestling with a conventional, solemn, dreary neighbour at a party, who lets drop one subject after another, with a series of dead non-committal statements, I feel inclined to say, " Why can't you trust me ? Do you like nothing, desire nothing, hope for nothing ? Have you no interests or preferences ? Why can't you produce them, admit them, bestow them ? " It does reduce social intercourse to such a very mean, base, stupid business if it ends in simply feeding side by side, like two pigs at one trough !

XXXIII

CONVERSATION

(1)

THE longer I live the more I wonder at the fact that, considering how much of one's life is spent in talk, how few people there are that devote any thought or trouble to the art of conversation. And this is further complicated by the fact that of the few people I have known who have deliberately and conscientiously taken pains with their talk, the greater number have been quite patent and indisputable bores.

The reason of this appears to be that the moment you begin to practise conversation as an art, and take thought about it, that moment you begin to lose sight of your auditors ; and as the first requisite of talk is that it should be sympathetic and spontaneous, as soon as it becomes an exposition or a demonstration, that moment the charm is gone. A talker must not, like a musician, lay down a scheme, take subject and counter-subject, and then proceed to work them out. The chances are ten to one that he becomes a soliloquist, and that is frankly intolerable. The soliloquist whom one cannot interrupt, who will not stop to discuss, who will not admit any attitude but applause and

assent, is an almost more uncivilised being than the man of stubborn and mulish silence. There should be an element of genial combat or of harmonious interchange in all talk. The artistic talker makes some simple gambit, encourages comment or dissent, and induces his company to develop their lines of thought. For the best talker of all is not the man whom one remembers as brilliant, but the man whose presence one welcomes because one feels lively and interesting in his company. And thus half the secret of good talk is discreet and amiable self-suppression ; and the reason why good talk is rare, is because it implies a combination of sympathy, observation, readiness, humour, impressiveness, and contagious bonhomie. For a talk to have been good, one must feel the time to have passed with great rapidity, one must regret the breaking up of a happy gathering, in a world where there seems so much to say and to hear, and one must depart, if not self-satisfied, at least conscious of having played a competent part.

What is fatal to a good talk is first of all any sense of aggressive and dominating intellectualism. The harsh intellectualist generally ends by having beheaded most of the company. If he is derisive as well, he is one shade worse, for his antagonists are not only dead but disgraced. Errors should not be publicly confuted in talk, unless their continuance is absolutely fatal to the conversation, and if corrected, should be represented as a mere conflict of opinion. Another fatal influence is that of the over-serious person, who regards humour as offensive levity.

But the most destructive and disconcerting talker is the man who credits himself with a poetical and suggestive quality of thought, and who dashes headlong into fantastic sentiment or nebulous paradox. Not long ago at a garden-party I drifted into a group which contained a talker of this kind, Harrison by name. Someone spoke of the unseasonable sharpness of the temperature. "Ah, yes," said Harrison, with his head erect, his eyes kindling and fixed on the horizon, "it makes one crave—does it not?—to open one's windows upon Italy—Italy—where the heart is high and the foot is light." No one can continue a talk on this level, and one feels a strong impulse, like Mr. Snagsby in the presence of Chadband, to say "Amen!" A little later our host pointed out the effigy of a knight which had been dug up in the garden, and told the story of its discovery. "What a rebuke," said Harrison, "to this materialistic age! Our forefathers set up their statues, bright and unashamed, in sunshine and free air; all that we can do is to bury them!" This comment seemed so little related to facts and so ambiguous in drift, that it reduced the party to silent stupefaction.

I do not think that Harrison has any intention of suspending human intercourse. But he is more concerned to be thought original and romantic than to minister to human needs; and talk, to be good, must be essentially altruistic. The man who takes more than his share, whom you cannot stop, whose conclusions you foresee, whose anecdotes you know, and who progresses evenly and heavily like a roller over the party is not only

unimaginative—he is selfish. He is like the man who helps himself to the whole of a dish, without thinking or caring whether his fellow-guests would like some too.

(2)

I would like to mention a few of the really good talkers whom I can remember and discuss their various methods of attack and strategy. One of the very best, in my recollection, was Canon Scott Holland. He had no charm of face and feature at first sight. He had a rubicund, loosely-cut, priestly air—no imagination, one would think, no incisiveness. But the moment he began to talk, his face became animated, radiant, expectant—he seemed like a joyful host coming to the door with hands outstretched to welcome you. He would begin about something in which he knew you were interested and would be sure to have something to say, and something too which claimed an admiration common to himself and you, rarely anything controversial. He had a delightful way of repeating the last few words of one's sentence, with a tone of approval, and he would then amplify it, but leave the credit to you. "Your point would be that . . ." and then would emerge a saying of which the germ perhaps could be recognised as your contribution, but, as in Wordsworth's sonnet, "the thing became a trumpet" in his deft hands. He told a few stories, but never for the story's sake ; and he had one very remarkable gift of being able, if necessary, to abandon a sentence in the middle, if it was

interrupted or not understood, without any resentment, and pass eagerly on to another aspect. He never said, "With reference to what I was saying"—or "You will give me the pleasure of telling you the sequel." It was gone, thrown away, not regarded, not recurred to; and this gave his talk a sense of great fullness and richness; then too he had a delicious sense of humour, and could abandon himself to helpless laughter at stories told by others. I used not to care much for his sermons; they were long, rhetorical and over-vehement. His immense fertility of expression caused astonishment rather than persuasion. But I think the charm of his talk lay perhaps most in his warm-heartedness, his eager sympathy, his need of you, so to speak. And he left one desiring to meet him again, and believing that if one was adequately supported and encouraged one was a talker too.

Then there was my old friend Howard Sturgis; he, I should say, was perhaps the best talker for *all* companies whom I have known. With Scott Holland a certain touch of earnestness was perhaps required, an interest in serious things, literature, art, social questions, religion. But Howard demanded nothing. He had the same welcoming power, and could be deeply emotional; but he could also be both ironical and provocative, though his irony seemed like a compliment; it did not hurt, it testified to your consequence. Then he would talk on, and if the circle was ill-assorted, shy, or sluggish, he could speak of the most trivial things with infinite grace and wit; if his talk was of people, he was helped by his wonderful power of mimicry, which he neither overdid nor unduly

prolonged—the real person flashed in for a phrase or two and vanished again. He did not seem to speak, as Scott Holland did, out of a store of thoughts and memories, but came rippling along like a quick-flowing stream. He had a great gift of vivid narrative, without any lengthiness, and a masterly power of handling the ludicrous and embarrassing situations in which he protested he so often found himself ; but good as all this public talk was—he had no inconvenient diffidence—he was even better in a *tête-à-tête*, because he dared to be frankly emotional, outspokenly affectionate, and effectually comforting. He always sent one forth cheered and encouraged, because though he did not forbear to criticise one, even sharply and incisively, he also had the gift of frank praise. He taught me many things, he helped me to attain to even more. Yet he had a quick temper, aroused by anything ungenerous, mean, or disloyal, and could give one, like the Old Moses in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, a “ deadly twitch ” with a phrase as sharp and clean as a lancet ; and there were occasions when he had no mercy, though he was the most *actively* loving friend I have ever had, the most absolutely faithful and self-sacrificing.

Now to touch upon another kind of talker—whom indeed I often met at Howard Sturgis's house—there was Henry James. He was not in the strict sense an exchanger of talk ; one fed him with likely questions, and he wound himself slowly and deliberately, with majestic gesture and eloquent mobilities of feature, into an intricate labyrinth of talk. But this did not become a

soliloquy, because it was all so intensely dramatic. "I ask myself," he frequently said, and though he did not very much invite argument or comment, he put an abundance of both into the mouths of his hearers—"No doubt your answer to that would be"—and one was only glad to be credited with anything so fine. But in a *tête-à-tête* he loved to discuss a case—"poor Herbert's case," for most of his acquaintance figured as "poor" in Henry James's talk, in order that they might be considered as indulgently as possible. In such talks he would press one for details—"let us have all the evidence we can—we must hold our noses very earnestly to this." Delightful too was the glimpse into the work-room of the mind that he afforded; the constant strengthening of the epithet, the amplification of the phrase. Not less delightful was the peremptory gesture with clenched fist, and the triumphant laugh at the final and decisive winding up of the defence or prosecution.

Another talker, of a wholly different kind, who was, I used to think, more to be depended upon to keep any circle going, was my own mother, though I should not venture to adduce her as an instance, if I had not so constantly heard it said by others. The difference between her and the talkers I have mentioned was this, that Henry James and Scott Holland required a certain degree of intellectual perception or artistic sympathy in their auditors before they expanded freely. Howard Sturgis indeed did not demand either, but my mother's range was a wider one than his because there were certain points of view of which Howard Sturgis

was contemptuous, and certain political and social opinions which he held with a provocative animus ; he disliked clericalism, for instance, and his radicalism was positive and aggressive. My mother, on the other hand, was profoundly and almost exclusively interested in human beings ; she had few political opinions and no denominational hostilities. She was curiously uninterested in scenery, art, music and literature of the lofty order. She was a thorough-going romanticist and individualist, and indeed often deplored her inability to enter into or even to grasp what was meant by corporate and co-operative schemes. It was the individual human being that she cared about, and I used to feel that she was really liberated, through her lack of interest in many departments of life, and set free to devote herself intensively to manifestations of human character. She had no touch of Mrs. Jellyby or Mrs. Partridge about her : she took no interest in states or societies, and was interested in opinions only because they revealed the temperament out of which they came. But the result was that I suppose few people have ever been more helpful to individual friends. She was not scientifically interested in the case or symptom, but in the kind of mind out of which it sprang. No autobiographical and sincere self-expression ever failed to interest her ; even the sentimentalist and the *poseur* attracted her, because of their willingness to assume so strange a rôle. Her talk therefore began about common experiences, and much of what followed consisted of questions, seductive because of the eager personal concern which accompanied them,

which gradually elicited from her companions a clear statement of their preferences and underlying reasons, if there were any such—though indeed the absence of all rational basis interested her fully as much. People became suddenly interested in themselves, because of the charm of finding themselves so interesting to her. The only disadvantage of her talk was that it often resulted in the circle beginning to suffer from suppressed or suspended replies ; but she caused people to make the delightful discovery that they had after all a definite point of view, when in ordinary circles it was tacitly assumed that they had none. She was the best instance I have known of the interpreter, as Job describes him, “one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness.” She presided at the birth of unexpected qualities, she sent people away pleased, not so much at being applauded, but at being entirely understood. She launched into talk with no diplomatic preface, no fatiguing hesitation. We used to tell a *ben trovato* story of her, that on being taken in to dinner at Lambeth by an eminent man, hitherto unknown to her, she was heard to say to him as they passed along the corridor, “Now you must really tell me at once your reasons for not believing in the immortality of the soul.” She had already discovered the fact. In a *tête-à-tête* she was even better, because her whole attention could be given to one individual case. And indeed I know no one whose talk was more helpful, not to learning her opinions—she had very few—but to discovering one’s own. She was an excellent instinctive logician, and left no part of the covert unbeaten.

I used to think that she was a wonderful person to consult in any difficult case which involved relations with other people, even if she did not know the people. She seemed to form an idea of them at once. With many of the friends who depended on her she performed a very priestly office; but she never yielded to the temptation of the priest to secure private understandings and secret influence. Her desire was to understand and to disentangle, and her patience was marvellous, though it did not come from any principle of self-control; it arose simply out of her engrossing interest in the case.

(3)

I have also heard in the course of my life several professional talkers, so to speak, anecdotists and narrators. These are often interesting and amusing, and many of their hearers resign themselves to placid enjoyment. It does not suit me personally, because of a natural restlessness which makes me very uncomfortable under restraint. I had a friend who told dramatic stories with much detail and with long pauses. Whether he used the pause to construct the next sentence, or whether it was for the sake of emphasis, I could never determine. But I acquired in listening to him the habit of *counting* during the pauses, and this imparted a new interest to his conversation, because it revived one if one could contrive to count forty in the gap. The late Lord Herschell was an admirable teller of legal stories, the facts all duly stated, and they were often most amusing. Sir

William Harcourt delighted in anecdote, but he gave one too much the impression, if anyone else joined in, that he was merely occupying the distasteful interval, when not discoursing, in polishing up his next performance. Perhaps the best of these narrators was the late Mr. George Russell, whom I have heard several times tell strings of stories, all unknown to me, and all, moreover, pointed and amusing; but enjoyment of it soon vanished in indifference and mental nausea. It was exactly as if one had been stuffed to satiety with plateful after plateful of delicious and piquant food. It was simply amazing to me that he did not see how much more attractive a small selection would have been.

There is a proverb that an Englishman is most natural when he is silent, and the fact remains that we are not instinctive talkers. The Americans are much more conscientious about this, though I confess I have been often more wearied than entertained by the elaborate structure of their talk, its oratorical quality, and the precision of their phrasing; what surprises me not infrequently about our own native talk is to realise how little responsibility many English people seem to have about it. A silence in a social gathering fills me with discomfort and shame. Yet at a big hotel, where I was lately staying, and where I spent time very pleasantly in the big dining-room watching the various groups, I noticed that there were a good many family parties, where food and not conversation was the sole business of a meal. Sometimes not a word was said. They sat, searching in their plates, arranging and preparing

portions for consumption with an absorbed and melancholy air, seeing and hearing nothing, only chewing and estimating. At other parties the young chattered, the old said nothing. In other groups, again, a pater- or materfamilias held forth interminably, listened to with dreary resignation ; it was a comparatively rare thing to see conversation flit about demurely as it ought to do, with little outbreaks of protest, little flashes of amusement. Of course, if a man or woman has no bird-like range of thought, no curiosity as to the ideas or opinions of others, there is no basis possible for conversation ; and the painful conclusion is that in England at least, though talk is one of the cheapest and most delightful of recreations, it is rare to find a good talker and very rare indeed to find a group that talks naturally, justly, and in graceful proportion ; and that where one does find talk, it is too often disfigured by *longueur* and heaviness, and partakes more of the nature of a solitary performance than of a social game, in which all players take a distinct and harmonious part.

XXXIV
ILL IN BED

(1)

I HAVE been sent to bed in the middle of my work, and at an extremely busy season, for an indefinite time—by which I do not necessarily mean a very long time ; but my gentle doctor, who is only too ready as a rule to feed the flickering flame of hope, now declines to make any promises whatever. The nature of my malady I will not reveal. I have never forgotten hearing old Mrs. Proctor, the friend of Wordsworth and Charles Lamb, whom Carlyle named, “ Our Lady of Bitterness,” say with sharp emphasis to my father (she was his first cousin once removed) who at the Lambeth dinner table had become a little plaintive about a cold, “ Never tell people how you are, Edward ! *They don't want to know !* ”

I recognised at once that this was one of those hard and biting truths in which reservations should be made—for it is only *generally* true. No one but a very grim Stoic philosopher can deny the soothing and encouraging effect of a leisurely conversation with a fellow-sufferer about fellow-symptoms, so to speak, which both sustains and consoles. But then Mrs. Proctor was a Stoic indeed.

It may suffice to say that my malady did not give me any particular pain and very little dis-

comfort, nor did it cast a shadow over my intellect or my emotions. It simply made it impossible for me to dress or to get about.

(2)

The first day was decidedly pleasant. I missed one or two engagements I wished to keep, but I also missed a good many that I didn't wish to keep. I was not interrupted, I was not harpy-driven or harried by engagements. I said luxuriously to myself as I woke out of a gentle slumber in the early afternoon, "At this moment my colleagues on the Amalgamated Board of Modern Studies are drawing in their chairs for a prolonged session—and I not there!" I thought of the protracted arguments, the familiar pleas, the threadbare sophistries, the irrational conclusions which would be triumphantly advanced for the hundredth time, and I said to myself, "Their blood be upon their own heads; they may pass what motions they like!" I felt like the sage in Wordsworth, "Thought was not—in enjoyment it expired," and I exulted too that time had temporarily ceased to exist. I dallied with my letters, I threw them down, I let my thoughts flow, an idle stream—as idle as a stream from the marsh to the sea that carves its shifting course before your eyes across the sand. Certainly the first day was a success; a sense of escape, and an infinite extension of leisure.

(3)

A kindly clever woman of my acquaintance says, "Certainly a recumbent position is a great aid to

cheerfulness." Yes, so long as you know that you can terminate it at any moment! But on the second day I wanted to get up a little, to go about, to see and hear things for myself; also I was vexed at the extraordinary number of small trifles which I had to get conveyed from my study table. People are too apt to think that a pencil and a piece of paper are all the tools and materials required for writing; it is as though one said that all a dentist required was a forceps. There are many little subordinate tools which a writer needs, not in constant requisition, but the absence of which may suspend one's flow. But I soon cleared off my letters; and then I began to do what is the real and true cause of thankfulness for enforced days in bed. I began to read Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, and I will here add that within four days I finished it, having interposed no other book. There can be no doubt at all as to the incomparable advantage of this; to read a big book at one lying, so to speak, you get a sense of atmosphere, of proportion, of drama, of *essence* which you get in no other way.

The august tragedy opened before me—it is a tragedy in the innermost sense of the word, because it represents the sufferings and death of a righteous man, whose misery was in a legal sense undeserved. If Scott had died at fifty, his life would hardly have been interesting. One would have frankly said, "This man has not had enough adversity to test his courage or to gauge his emotions. His faults, like his reluctance to face trouble, his reverence for rank and station, his respect for wealth, his heedlessly boisterous spirits

would have unnecessarily affected one. But as it is, under the glare of misfortune, they are seen to be trivial and superficial, they melt into vapour like water spilt on marble in a high hot noon. There is a certain dreadfulness about the early gatherings at Abbotsford, the absurd perky castle—such a fantastic caricature of history—the rich meals, the row, the laughter; all such a meaningless *rou-haha*! But when once the sad calm diary begins one worships Scott, one feels that one would do anything to save him some of his cruel labour and his dull brave pain. . . .

There are other books, *Jean Christophe*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *Paradise Lost*, Carlyle's *Frederick the Great*, *The Ring and the Book*, *The Life of Dr. Pusey* (a highly entertaining work), which can be read in bed in the right way. I do not mean that they cannot be waded through in halting and slipshod fashion, *à plusieurs reprises*, but what they all need is continuity and unity of mood. Imagine, for instance, what a different idea you would have of the Thames or of the Ouse if you could get into a boat at the source, and row down to the sea. The river would have a soul for you then, not be merely a bundle of bright episodes. So with a book; and I have no doubt that if one is to be in bed for three or four days, one should make a solemn dedication of one's eyes and mind to a big book, and keep one's vow.

(4)

On the third day I was in a less serene frame of mind. Things tended to slant, slope, fall, spill.

If I laid a book down open, the pages quietly and meekly turned over and obliterated the place; food lodged in folds and crevices. It was with a shuddering disgust that in the middle of the afternoon my fingers closed on a clammy fragment of lettuce, lurking in a *duvet*. There suddenly seemed to be too much of the great book; it was inconsiderate of Scott to have lived so long, it must have damaged his reputation. There was a sameness about his ideas. . . . I cannot read three letters running to the Duke of Buccleuch. Then my malady or my cramped position suddenly engendered a fearful and overpowering heat. "I must be getting worse," I said; "soon I may be delirious; coma may supervene—that is how good men die, in the midst of life . . . in the midst of Lockhart's *Life of Scott* . . . come, let me see that my finger is found in some touching and significant page!" . . .

When I awoke, I felt an extreme desire to be going out to dinner with an old friend or two—the old dishes, the old stories, how good they were! How one undervalued them, in good health! I asked if no one had come to see me. Yes, Mr. R. had been, and left a message about an umbrella. "He said you were not to trouble about it." I laughed derisively. "He need not be anxious," I said. "Is this a time to trouble about umbrellas, when I am deep in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, and deserted by all my old friends? Umbrellas! What umbrella, pray?" "It was the one he lent you, Sir." Of course, I remembered! The good R., on a dripping night a week ago, had turned up his coat collar and thrust his umbrella

into my hand. The incident had a profound pathos. How would Walter Scott have behaved ?

Still it was odd that no one had been to see me. "How little indispensable we are, after all!" I said. "Still I am alone and sad, and the Gospel is quite clear as to the duty of visiting the sick." A moment later a friend called, and we had half an hour of perfunctory talk. When he went away, I said to my servant, "These interruptions are detestable, when I had just settled down to a good read! People seem to have plenty of time on their hands, and I have done nothing. The day seems to have exploded! When will my dinner be ready?"

(5)

On the fourth day I was calm and sad. I felt in need of consolation. I said to myself, "How ridiculous it is that all the consolations which philosophers and essayists and poets write are for things which one cannot rehearse or even imagine beforehand—blindness, deafness, loss of money, loss of reputation, loss of friends, death. One cannot practise these distastes beforehand, one cannot go about blindfolded, or try to care less for one's friends, so as to feel it less if one lost them. One can't anticipate unalterable catastrophes, one can only do the best one can when they come. 'What sort of boys go to heaven?' said a pious teacher to his class. 'Dead boys!' said a triumphant urchin. 'Teach me to live that I may dread the grave as little as my bed.' That is really without meaning; and it is morbid to spend one's time so, as morbid as Donne's fancy

of being painted in his shroud—though he had braziers burning all day in his study, for fear of catching cold ! ”

What one needs is consolation and advice for the small, annoying, tiresome, provoking catastrophes, paltry accidents, the recopying of letters because one has begun with the wrong ascription, the idiotic things one says through tactlessness, the stumbling over concealed footstools, the missing of trains, the puncturing of bicycle-tyres. That is when one needs courage and good humour and common sense. The apparent coldness of friends, for instance ? It certainly was something more than a mere chance that so few of my friends had been to see me. It must have been arranged—I have been so confident of being welcomed and wanted of late, that they have determined to give me a lesson. I could imagine my friends deserting their work and congregating together to discuss what I should feel most acutely. “ Curious, how petty people are,” I said to myself. The day passed in mournful and humiliating reveries.

(6)

On the fifth day my doctor came early. “ Well done,” he said with affected geniality. “ You can get up. I wouldn’t go out, but you can do your ordinary work.”

“ Good heavens ! ” I said. “ What am I to do about Lockhart’s *Life of Scott* ? ” “ Oh, that can wait,” said the doctor—“ read it for half an hour before you go to bed. It’s a pity to try to swallow these big books whole ! ”

XXXV

PENSIONERS

IT fell to me not long ago to visit some pensioners of an institution to which I belong, most of them not personally known to me ; and the experience was so strange and opened so many doors in the imagination that I venture to put the impression down. "Opened," I said ; but that was the mysterious part of it, that the door was opened for so brief a glimpse, and so instantly and impenetrably closed again that it quickened rather than satisfied the curious fancy.

It all happened in London, or rather it was the London pensioners that we visited, mostly old or elderly women, living where and as they would. But so wide was the scope of our investigations that at one time we were paying a call on the edge of Epping Forest, while our last visit was to a house some way south of Clapham Junction.

The first of many points that struck me was that though we skirmished half over London we saw so little of anything that could be called a slum. Of course slums exist—if you enter London by train, you look down sometimes from high embankments into the crowded backyards of very ill-built and crowded tenements. But if my recent experience had been my only sight of London, I

should have concluded that London consisted, the moment you emerged from the main thoroughfares, of endless streets of small trim houses of tasteless decorum, sometimes quite plain and austere, sometimes breaking out into bow-windows and stone facings, with strips of coloured tiles, very neat, but a perfect nightmare of pretentious ornament. These little houses are not so much ugly as deeply unpleasing, the wrong colours, the wrong shapes, the wrong materials ; they show an instinct feeling after adornment, but going utterly and hideously astray on perky and jaunty lines. Yet imbedded among these serried and conventional ranks were glimpses of beauty, an old quiet alms-house, a tall Queen Anne house of mellow brick with solid casement lines ; or best of all big old mansions of bygone wealthy city-folk, once no doubt set among paddocks and shrubberies, but now withdrawn into a sort of affronted dignity behind high walls, with laburnums and red-flowering chestnuts looking sullenly over. Who now inhabits these great many-roomed places ! I cannot divine.

As for all the visits we paid, I can but select three or four which stand out from the rest. Many of the pensioners were quiet, industrious, self-respecting women, who no doubt kept themselves to themselves, sincerely grateful for a solid little annuity, which gave them at all events freedom from the pressing anxieties of helpless age.

In one house—it looked out on a wide expanse of public park, with pools and gravelled play-spaces and a glimpse of high wooded hills behind—there lay in a rather crowded bed-sitting-room,

on a sofa covered with rugs, an elderly lady of gracious manner and demeanour, reading a volume of Tennyson, and fully prepared to talk about the literary and artistic topics of the day. Her refinement was perhaps of the excessive order which necessitated the simplest names of common disorders being whispered, rather archly, behind a sheltering hand, while the fact that her married daughter with whom she lived had lately become a mother could only be communicated by nods and winks and infinite periphrasis. Watching her grandmother, as we talked, stood a bluff and sturdy girl, ardently desiring to be out in the world, and yet obviously admiring Granny's unquestionable social distinction. Here there was or had been a mystery of some kind—for I have seen Countesses of much less dignity and self-possession !

It was rather a relief, after this, to visit an old lady of ninety-six, permanently in bed, in a much poorer house, but with every evidence of a much livelier family life. The old dame had the face of an angel, so utterly kind and sweet-tempered and selfless it had become ; her porcelain complexion, her transparent blue-veined hands showed a life long withdrawn from common use. She was in no pain, but she slept very little, she could not read, she could only richly remember and wait for the last change. But the old lady had an entirely merry and provocative temperament. She called us by imaginary names, she rallied her devoted daughter, she said in reply to a compliment from myself on the trimness of the room, " Ah, but there are a great many common things covered

up—it amuses my daughter to do that,” and she bade us farewell with a touch of roguishness, and an expressed determination to go on drawing her pension for many years yet—an entirely wholesome-minded, honest, well-beloved woman.

Then there was a visit to an old gardener, into whose quiet, smiling, tired look something of the peacefulness of the earth and the brightness of the flowers seemed to have passed. He was sitting in a small room, looking out on the back-gardens of houses, with so much large furniture about him that there seemed only narrow alleys and gangways among the chairs and tables. His kindly well-dressed wife, much younger than himself, said that all that ailed him was that he could not get out enough into the open air, he was so crippled by rheumatism ; he held an old flower-catalogue in his hands—he had been living, no doubt, among well-stored recollections of flower and vegetable and fruit, and he turned from one speaker to another with a gentle amused smile.

Then, the raciest and most perplexing of all, was a fierce old woman with snow-white hair and humped shoulders, of eighty-eight, very small of stature and quick of movement, who had a bad word to say for everyone and everything. Her room was most dainty and smart, a villa parlour, but when I admired it, she said, “ It’s a perfect prison to me ! ” She wanted, it seemed, to go out long walks alone, and complained that there was always someone detailed to follow her—“ Dogged and spied upon, I call it ! ” and adding, “ In *my* younger days, we had work of our own to do ! ” When we asked if she saw anything of her numerous

nephews and nieces, she said, "Believe me, nephews and nieces are no good to anyone. They are not near enough to be kind, or far enough away to be polite. People now are brought up to think of nothing but themselves and their own pleasures—nephews and nieces indeed!" (with piercing emphasis). "They don't trouble me much!"

She sat and looked at us with frank defiance and dislike; she hated being under an obligation to us, and said good-bye with relish. Downstairs we found the landlord of the house waiting, a ruddy man, with upstanding hair, staring eyes and a permanently fallen mouth, a man who lived, it was evident, among domestic crises. He drew us into his parlour. "Can't I be rid of this old—this old woman?" he said somewhat piteously. We pointed out that we had no hold over her; "Why not give her notice?" "I do, almost every day," he said, "but she won't go!" "What have you to complain of?" "Why, that she quarrels with everyone; and then she keeps a fire and a paraffin lamp burning all night, all the year round, and the other lodgers object; and then she is always going off for walks, and we daren't let her go alone. She might have a stroke and be brought back helpless in a wheel-barrow." The prospect of the old lady being irremediably fixed in his lodgings was too much for the good man; he winked his eyes and swallowed a lump in his throat. We undertook to interview the senior nephew. He shook his head mournfully. "That's no use," he said. "He daren't go near her, she's got a tongue like nothing—like a knife, as you might say." He opened the door to let us

out. There was the old lady herself in the passage, having disdainfully refused, on the score of health, to come down to the door with us. She was in a crouching posture near the keyhole, and a light of battle danced in her little black eyes. She made us a scornful bow, and we hurried off. There was deep pity in my heart for the staring landlord, and for the bad quarter of an hour he was going to have. But a tenant is very much of a fixture, in days when all have equal rights except owners of property.

Strangest of all, perhaps, was a weak-looking woman, with an overmastering cough, who lived at the very top of a high, dark, ill-smelling lodging-house somewhere in Southwark. We toiled up much-worn stairs, with greasy walls, and on each landing was a gruesome pile of lumber covered with frowsy rugs or cloths.

Her lodging consisted of a fair-sized room overlooking the street and a far vista of chimney-pots, with the grand, serene white outlines of St. Paul's above all. There was a tiny bedroom for mother and daughter ; a stifling kitchen ; I suppose the son, unemployed, slept in the sitting-room. Yet here was a costly-looking inlaid table, and wonder of wonders, a grand piano, how hauled up thither I cannot conceive, which the woman seemed to regard as a certificate of limitless respectability. No one, so far as we could make out, ever played it, and indeed its lid formed a shelf for an infinite variety of articles, from jugs to boots. Every window was closely shut and the sickly scent of the dingy room was overpowering. Yet we had no complaints, no comments, and evidently the

last thing in the good lady's mind was any thought of changing or bettering her conditions and surroundings ; " a snug little place," she said, " and airy too, if it weren't for all those stairs—so bad for my cough ! "

These were some of our special cases. But quite apart from the special problems and the thoughts that these visits evoked, I found myself again and again, as we threaded these miles of tame little streets with their neat hutches, wondering in myself with a surpassing wonder, what the vast anthill meant exactly, and what (if one admits any design or forethought in the making and ordering of the world at all—as I for one heartily do) its denizens were all here for ? They had ideas, thoughts, hopes, fears, fancies, most of these myriads of men and women, and were tethered pretty closely to their little bit of work, their little family circles. Was it for their sakes that they were all here, loving their lives well enough, I suppose, and content to live so—or at all events enjoying the world enough to be very much disturbed at the idea of quitting it ? And what effect was this limited little bit of experience going to have upon them ? What was ahead of them, when in one of the little bow-windowed bedrooms they lay in pain and stupor, with the familiar street sounds going on so heedlessly outside, trying to glean some scrap of hope from the kind sad faces round them ?

But one must not get caught in speculation like that ; and the very sense of self-importance that the meanest and humblest life holds within itself is a proof, I think, of some bigger destiny.

But then to come closer to details, on what was the life of these old pensioners of ours built? Of what did it consist? Household duties, a shopping expedition, a little talk, a bit of reading or some needlework—a life of minute self-contained routine. Some had evidently a wide range of affections—here was an album filled with snapshots of distant lands, dating from the war, the gift of a soldier son—some had son or daughter to keep house for; one had the visit of a kindly clergyman and the church services to look forward to; one was absorbed in the care of an elderly bullfinch, much flustered by the advent of strangers; some had pictures of grandchildren to show, with tales of their clever sayings. But in spite of the numerous open spaces—tree-shaded shrub-set parks full of children playing and babies sprawling in the grass—which seem to be sprinkled liberally enough about these huge expanded tracts of habitations, there fell on me a sense of confinement and dreariness, especially in close rooms baked by the insistent sun.

And anyhow that was what their world was; most of them seemed to make the best of it, though there were a few rooms of stuffy squalor, no order, no comfort, but heaps of sordid rubbish, unsorted, dusty, ill-flavoured things, and the owner wearing a submissive, helpless smile. The dreadful dullness of it all! The absence of any *hint* of beauty, the lack of all larger outside interests—it seemed as if they might have been so much better employed and happier if they could be living the fresher and sweeter life of the countryside.

What influence is there that could touch these

narrow lives to finer issues? The world seems to contain so many seeds of beauty and delight waiting to fall on human hearts. But is not the very soil here rendered sterile by the insistent claims of life, which seem to give nothing and to take so much away? They have no adventures, not much discomfort, few kindly passions, no ambitions, no enthusiasms. It is an orderly community, crowded with conventions at once pretentious and decorous. The difficulty seems to be that there are so few obvious wrongs to be righted, and yet the whole is so deeply tainted with the secure dullness which seems of itself the most tragic of wrongs.

XXXVI

MODERN MORALITIES

I HAVE been looking, with the utmost bewilderment, through a bundle of old letters, letters received by an undergraduate about 1850 and carefully preserved. The whole style and quality of the letters seems so utterly different not only from the kind of thing which undergraduates would write now, but from what undergraduates, one would have supposed, could ever have written. The odd thing about it is that such a tone had wholly and entirely disappeared in my own undergraduate days. I don't think that the letters I wrote and received as an undergraduate from fellow-undergraduates differ very much from what would be written now—scrawled scanty documents, trying to be funny and not succeeding, with a faint assumption of cynicism, and in a sense affected, because reflecting a convention. The convention in my own time and the convention now is that it would be impossible and inappropriate to be in the least degree serious in letters. I was myself in a sense serious-minded, though in a dilettante way, about religious problems, and was interested in books, poetry, art. It was possible in my time, in a *tête-à-tête* with a friend, and even on occasions of formal discussion, to talk

seriously enough and to express interest in books and ideas. I remember intensely earnest and even emotional conversations—not very frequent, I confess, but I can still remember them. For instance, I can recollect that, when I was twenty, one summer morning I had a most tremendously serious talk in the roundabout at Trinity with a man of I suppose twenty-three, who had just been elected a Fellow of Trinity, in which he warned me, very trenchantly and yet affectionately, against accepting too much as a matter of course the orthodox ecclesiastical position ; but I do not remember any similar correspondence ever passing between myself and my friends. Letters at my date were collections of personal gossip about one's own circle, jokes, anecdotes, and were always written on the assumption that one was idle, cynical, indifferent, trivial ; the one thing one could not be was serious ; that was priggish, and priggishness was the unpardonable sin. In a sense the older letters are more unaffected, because they did deal frankly, if pompously, with the thoughts and preoccupations of the writers. They are immensely elaborate in style, rather singularly outspoken emotionally, and as I say extremely serious. They are to me intolerably tiresome documents. The humour is of the heaviest, and mainly consists in the use of very lengthy periphrasis and pompous diction. One of the writers, for instance, says, " Let me touch for an instant upon another congenial topic, which will at once evoke your decorative sympathies. Beshrew me, but I have sartorial intentions and none of the most parsimonious. The giddy world claims an

increasing share of my not unwilling attention. Invitations to banquets, routs, even Terpsichorean assemblies are as thick upon my table as flowers in spring. I have reviewed my wardrobe with anxious care and have decided that adolescent muscularity demands a less restrictive outfit than my former unsociable propensities claimed. I therefore propose a visit to Blewst's and it may be that in the marble halls which you occasionally grace with your presence, you will observe the larva of our pastoral rambles resplendent as the butterfly liberated by vernal airs from the duller integuments of the homely chrysalis." This sentence only means that the writer is about to order a new suit of dress clothes ; the labour of composition is obvious ; but what is less conceivable is that either the composition or reception of such a document should have afforded the smallest species of amusement. So much for the humour of these letters, which is all of the same sort. I suppose that it was a parody of Johnsonian involution, and that it really contained an intelligent and lively remonstrance against some tendency to exaggerated verbosity.

But the mixture of candid affection with intense moral seriousness is what really constitutes the interest of these letters, always, I may say, alluded to as 'epistolary labours,' and not without a real claim to be so described. What can one make of the following ?

" BELOVED HARRY,

" The festive season of Christmas with all its innocent gaiety and congenial repletion is now

impending over us, and I cannot allow it to pass without communicating to you what is already, I think, familiar to your jaded ears, namely a sense of the sincere devotion with which I regard you and my heartfelt desire that you may not only innocuously indulge in the domestic dissipations of the time but return refreshed thereby to the literary and theological labours of our little community. It is with the sincerest affection, I need hardly assure you, that I wish you the compliments of the season, and wish you all the prosperity and happiness which one friendly heart may safely wish another in this vale of tears. I do indeed miss you every moment of the day and ask myself in the words of our gifted romancer, 'Where is County Guy? . . .'

"But I should be untrue to the best interests of friendship and the more solemn associations of the season if I did not faithfully and affectionately say to you that I have observed with much concern and genuine misgiving a tendency towards self-approval and self-confidence in you of late, no doubt a natural enough sequel of the well-deserved academical successes which have crowned your efforts. I have not been alone in noticing this. Had not the same criticism spontaneously come to the lips of several of our compeers I should have put it down to a sense of mortified vanity in myself and resolutely kept silence. But I cannot believe that we are all mistaken. I have myself observed in you a tendency to deal summarily with the opinions of others, and to maintain your own with a certainty and even a degree of contempt which would only be justified—if even then

—by a larger and more varied experience. Let me beg of you seriously to consider your position, and to ask yourself if you are not conscious of a sense of superiority which makes you blind to the rights of others as well as careless of your own higher interests with respect to that modesty which is the foundation of all self-respect, as well as the only true title to the respect of others.”

The writer then copies an extract out of one of South’s sermons and says that he is sending a little book with a page turned down, which he will ask his correspondent to read and weigh. The letter concludes with a fervent appeal to his friend not to misunderstand his criticism and to be equally candid in exposing to him the faults of which he may be unconscious. He goes on to say that no friendship can possibly be worth anything which is not based upon an earnest desire for mutual improvement, and ends with protesting his unalterable devotion in the most emotional way. . . .

More than one of the writers of these letters arrived at high distinction in the world ; but what seems impossible to realise is that when they wrote them they were just ordinary undergraduates, working, playing games, talking and gossiping. It seems clear that a letter was considered a more appropriate way of convincing a friend of sin than a conversation, because it is clear that the subject had not been discussed between them. But how many undergraduates tell each other of their faults nowadays ? And does one desire that they should ? It is certain

that young men do manage somehow to criticise each other nowadays ; but it is done more at a crisis, in a moment of irritation and anger, in an ebullition of wrath, and not taken solemnly in hand as a duty.

What is the reason of this singular change ? I suppose that at an earlier date than these letters, when postage was more expensive, a letter was apt to be a much more weighty and serious affair, hardly to be written unless it had important tidings or profound reflections to communicate, and this sense of momentousness about a letter had probably not yet disappeared. Moreover, it is probable that all literary composition was regarded much more technically than is now the case. Nowadays when the one aim of the most elaborate prose is to say what one means as lucidly and directly as one can, and when journalism aims at a frankly conversational style, a letter is successful exactly in so far as it communicates a perfectly natural impression of its writer. Fitzgerald used to say that to hear in imagination the voice of a letter-writer, as one read his letter, was a test of its excellence. But in those days diction was still supreme ; and if anyone sat down pen in hand to compose, he never thought of improvising, he raised a well-designed and ornate structure of words and aimed at rotundity of period and magniloquence of expression.

But there is something more than that behind the change. I am inclined to credit Kingsley with creating a great revulsion in the domain of what we call priggishness. Kingsley was not at all a foe to serious enthusiasm, but he was a foe to all pomposity and solemnity. Enthusiasm and

indignation were in his mind things which must escape from a man, overleaping the conventions of civility and decorum, not things to be elaborately paraded. I can think of no other writer who had so direct an effect on his time in that respect. Of course our young "grads" of 1850 read Dickens and Thackeray; but there is not a trace of the effect of these writers in their epistolary efforts.

And then there is a further fact. It was just about that time that the relations of parents and children began to alter. Instead of a parent being an aloof and dignified being who condescended to some show of affection and could be counted upon to punish or at least to improve the occasion, a natural companionship sprang up, and sympathy took the place of discipline. The schools followed suit. I remember well that at my own private school, in the earlier 'seventies, the senior masters were unapproachable, commonplace, vulgar, irritable beings, who arrived at the school with small hand-bags and disappeared from view when they had finished their teaching: but the younger masters fresh from the University began to play with us and to talk to us, to treat us like reasonable boys, with a sort of elder-brotherly kindness which was very delightful. It was just the same at Eton. The senior masters, with their silk gowns, their Gladstone collars, their suspicious and dictatorial ways, their mechanical justice, seemed like antediluvian survivals. Then came a generation of kindly accessible men, friendly and paternal, who could be trusted to take circumstances into account. But they

still always condescended, and however well one might know them, there was always a certain distance kept. But the younger generation of masters were much more like big schoolboys ; they played games, they fraternised, they were humorous, tolerant, respectful, with a real sense of equality and unaffectedness about them. Perhaps they made too dead a set against priggishness, so that one might know them well and yet hardly guess that they felt seriously and anxiously about the problems of boyhood.

The same thing was going on at the Universities ; and moreover, a very different class of man was entering the teaching profession. It had hitherto been, on the whole, a rather despised profession, hardly a career, and not thought of by men who were ambitious for distinction. There is a letter extant from Sumner, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, in which he speaks of the enormous relief with which he resigned his " disgusting " labours as an Eton master. No doubt the word disgusting has altered its sense and did not then mean much more than the word " distasteful " now. But he complains that the system of the place had debarred him from ever saying a word on religious matters to his boys. I remember that a senior master at Eton once told me that when he succeeded to a boarding-house, the only counsel he received from an older colleague as to methods of house discipline was the advice never to let any boy speak a word at the house dinner, and to set any offender a long punishment. The result of all that stiffness and grimness was to introduce an element of formality into all such

relations, and this, I think, filtered down even into the relations of undergraduates with each other. I do not mean that the cheerful and natural levity of youth disappeared ; but occasions were more respected, and if an occasion was felt to be a solemn one, a tone of elaborate and formal magniloquence seemed to be the appropriate vehicle to employ. Now the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. There is a story of a bluff and good-natured schoolmaster who was asked by a colleague what line he took when he prepared boys for confirmation. " Oh, I don't know," he said, " I just tell them to buck up."

I do not think that I either regret or welcome the change. It probably is not so radical a change as it appears. Words are after all only the symbols of emotions. I do not suppose that there is less seriousness in the world now than then, and I expect that it finds channels of expression to flow in which convey the meaning under phrases of a different colour. The point is that the emotion should somehow betray itself, and it is not only through language that emotion finds expression. A glance, a gesture, and a curt, even humorous phrase may show that a man is earnest just as well as a sentence full of great adjectives and strict antithesis, and I am not sure that it is not even more impressive if it stands out against a background of unaffected lightness. One cannot make a greater mistake than to think that emotions have disappeared because the expression of them has varied. A man may propose marriage in a humorous sentence in a railway carriage just as effectively as if he went down on his knees in a

boudoir and indulged in elaborate protestations. I think that we have a taste nowadays for a crisp, light, simple jocose handling of subjects, and I do not know that the world is either the worse or the better for it. It is only a superficial affair after all, and I do not believe that the deeper, stronger, richer currents of emotion and feeling and moral seriousness are much affected by methods of presentment. Indeed I believe that there is now actually more moral emotion in the world. I think that sympathy increases and with it a far stronger sense of the rights of other people. Bullying has practically disappeared at schools, and the deliberate infliction of pain upon the weak, which was an apparently ineradicable feature of school-life seventy years ago, has become at all events unfashionable ; it is no longer held to be amusing. So too at the Universities there is far more refinement, courtesy, kindness and tolerance than there was fifty years ago. The tone is certainly not more effeminate—the increased cult of athletics has guarded against that—but it is certainly far more humane.

And so I do not feel that the disappearance of the spirit indicated by the old letters is in any way a loss, because though perhaps it indicates that we look at things at a different angle, I do not think that it means a weakening of the moral fibre, but a mere increase of superficial unaffectedness.

XXXVII

FRIENDSHIP

B. L.

It certainly is, as you say, quite extraordinary what unpleasant remarks and comments and criticisms about oneself some people will repeat to one. But what is odder still, it is not only done by malicious and spiteful people, who enjoy giving pain—that is quite intelligible. It is done by quite kind and friendly people on occasions. I was talking the other day to Loveday the novelist, who is an extremely sensitive fellow—perhaps you know his books, fantastic, rather melancholy stories, but with a beauty of their own. He told me he had been calling on a friend of his, a clever and kindly woman. There were some other people there, and she said she had something to say to him when they had gone. When they were alone together, she said, “I was talking about you to a woman-friend of mine yesterday, who is a writer herself, and she said that your books were like a sort of rash which seemed to relieve the system, for she understands that they leave you quite sane and pleasant!”

She stood, he said, smiling down at him leaning against the mantelpiece. “I was absolutely stupe-

fied for a minute," he went on, "and then I said, 'What on earth makes you hand on this dirty bit of mud to me, and repeat such ugly and spiteful gossip?' " She looked a little troubled at that, and broke in rather eagerly, "Oh, I thought you ought to know—it rather rankled in my mind; but of course I stuck up for you!" "To show your loyalty?" he asked. "Yes," she said, "that was it! I hated to hear such nasty things said about you." "But don't you see," he said, "that it doesn't matter a bit that such things should be *said*? The only harm is that they should be repeated to me. Could anyone in the world feel anything but discouragement and disgust at hearing such a remark about his work and himself—what conceivable good can it do me? I can't change my style and method because of it, and it can only make me dissatisfied with my work." "Of course I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," she said. "Then what did you mean to do?" he asked. "Oh," she replied, "I couldn't bear to keep such an unpleasant thing in my mind; I felt it was not frank to know it and not to say it!" He said that he was quite unable to make her see that she had done anything in the least unfriendly; she thought it was rather the other way—and he went on to say that it simply meant the loss of a friend. "I shall merely give up going to see her," he said. "I shall always be afraid that she may say something of the same kind again."

That seemed to me a curious and interesting story. It is an instance of what is not an uncommon thing, the curious stupidity of clever people on certain points. I know the woman

myself. She is lively and intelligent, and she enjoys having private understandings with people, but she is just lacking in the right sort of sympathy. She would not, I believe, have repeated the remark to other people; that she would have thought disloyal, but she wished to share her secret, and to show her sympathy, and to prove that she had defended her friend. It quite escaped her that the criticism itself would be deeply wounding to Loveday. She thought he would value her repudiation of it more than he would mind the original criticism.

I told Loveday that it reminded me of the woman who said to the Count of Fessonage, "Someone was telling me last night that you were known to have cheated a dozen times at cards, but I defended you with all my might. I said that only on three occasions had it really been proved!"

Personally I do not care in the least what is said about me, my works and ways, if it is not said to me. We can't be expected to cherish illusions about each other. It is quite allowable to think and even to say that a person is ugly, vulgar, snobbish, ill-bred, tiresome, pompous, ill-tempered, disagreeable. But we can't say this to his face, unless indeed we feel that he really must be told in his own interest, and that the fault may be curable. Even so, it is not our business to go about telling people such things. The only case where it may be a duty to speak is if a friend is really doing himself harm by some carelessness, which he could and would check if he knew of it; it may be a painful matter to speak,

and it must be done very delicately and tactfully. But to tell a man of something which he can't cure is simply to make him aware that he is disliked, and to discourage him.

My theory of friendship is exactly the opposite ; it ought to give me the right to tell a friend the pleasant and encouraging things which are said about him, to praise him generously, to make the best of him, to surround him with sunlight and music. We can't help becoming aware of our faults and failures, and a friend's pleasure ought to be to minimise them, to keep unpleasant comments away from him, to " quench the fiery darts of the wicked." If we love anyone it is because we take him as he is, faults and virtues alike, and recognise that he is on the whole lovable. We are not bound to consider him faultless or perfect. We need not tell lies to him or flatter him. But we can stand between him and his faults. I think that the first sign that a friendship is on the wane is generally when two friends begin to be painfully aware of faults in each other which they have hitherto overlooked ; and the moment that we begin to say to ourselves that our friend ought to be made aware of this fault and that, implies that the emotion is flagging. I do not much believe in keeping up friendships artificially, out of mere loyalty, because the basis of the whole affair is a mutual admiration and a mutual desire to serve and help and comfort. Friendships are things out of which we are bound to grow. Two people may have, at a certain time in their lives, a strong mutual sympathy and congeniality, but this may then begin to develop on different

lines. It need not be deterioration on either side ; their interests and ideas may just shift, and there is nothing immutable about the relations which grow up between human beings. One ought to be able to drop a friendship, simply and naturally, when the time comes. They are sacred and beautiful while they last, but it seems to me a false sort of loyalty to say, " This relation must be eternal." We don't know enough of human nature to say that. Our entry into the world, our development, our growth and our decay are not matters that are entirely a matter of will ; and to use our wills to persuade ourselves that an emotion exists, when it has spontaneously ceased, seems to me a mere pretence, and as fruitless as all pretences. Occasionally one does, to one's immense happiness, find a friendship which grows and extends itself, until one reaches a sort of trust and confidence which cannot be disturbed. But, on the other hand, two people may be attracted by each other, and at first show their best side, and then gradually make discoveries about each other and find real incompatibilities which did not at first appear. Then it seems to me a hopeless business to go on trying not to see or feel the oppositions and repugnances which are really there. I do not mean that all differences of temperament matter ; indeed, the best friendships often seem to me to be those where there is a real basis of compatibility, and yet where there are qualities and faculties in each friend, which the other can genuinely admire without possessing.

In fact, friendship is not a thing which can be

governed by rules and principles. It is just a need and a response to a need ; and when either the need or the response ceases to exist, the friendship is at an end. I believe myself in making experiments, in giving oneself away freely and ungrudgingly ; in gladly and gratefully recognising charm, in cultivating alliances. But I do not believe in trying to establish eternal claims and duties. The only basis of friendship is service and help and joy ; there must be no exacting or imposing or demanding. It is just an experience, which may occasionally be lasting, and which ought in any case to leave a fragrance behind it ; and it only leaves a bitterness behind it when it has proved a strain which has been prolonged out of a sense of loyalty and duty. The result of that is often a sharp and sad severance, but it is better to risk even that, than to keep ourselves close and never to reach out hands of affection at all.

XXXVIII

A LOST FRIEND

I WAS sitting, that bright summer day, in a cheerful and tranquil mood, working quietly in my accustomed chair, with the birds twittering in the little shrubbery outside my window, and a light breeze just stirring the limes by the chapel wall, when the letter, telling me of the wholly unexpected death of an old acquaintance, was put into my hands. He was not a close friend ; we only met at rare intervals, but it was always pleasant to see him and we always found plenty to talk about. He was a strong, healthy, good-humoured, unimaginative man, a hard worker well content with life and playing a useful part in the world.

I put the letter down and sat thinking ; his figure and face as I saw him last rose up before me sharply and distinctly, the sturdy, rather clumsily built frame, the homely, kindly face, so often lit up with the genial smile. With what a sudden awe and mystery it was all enveloped ! He was to be buried next day and he was, no doubt, lying now pale and still and shrouded in the darkened room, in the familiar house, the little home-circle plunged in grief and heaviness. The study that I knew so well, with its faint scent of tobacco, the well-used books, the piles of papers,

the comfortable old fireside chairs, the well-known pictures, all the evidences of genial, active, wholesome life, he had said good-bye to all that for ever. For a time how difficult it would be to use that room ; with what pathos and sanctity it would all be enveloped. Then the papers would be cleared away, the personal belongings stored in some cupboard, new life would flow into the old channels, the memory of him, his firm tread, his loud friendly voice, his good-humoured decisiveness would fade and fade, even in the minds of those that loved him best, into something lost, regretted, honoured, till at last there would be active grief no more, but something rounded into a pure, strong, tender memory, gratefully recognised of one whose work was done long ago, but was a part of life no more. It must be so, and it is right that it should be so.

What do I really think about it all in my inmost heart, away from all conventional phrases and sentiments ? Let me try to disentangle that if I can. It is easier for me to do this because mine is not an active poignant grief ; it is not that I shall miss him at every turn, because he was in no sense a part of my life ; our meetings were not planned, for we often held no communication for months together ; it was just pleasant to think of him as living in the world ; there was the possibility of our meeting, and the certainty that if we met there would be the same frank and easy friendliness, the comparison of experiences, the cheerful gossip about friends and books and ideas. Thus I cannot say it is a deep shock to me ; it is a sorrow, but it will not overshadow my life or interrupt the current of it. He will be often in my mind for a

time and then my life will go on as before. Thus it is easier for me to say what I think and feel about it all because I shall not miss him at every moment and wish him back again.

First, I think of the spirit as something wholly imperishable and indestructible. Even the mortal body is that ; the frame I knew so well will moulder into dust, but it will only be transformed and changed, not a particle lost or vanished ; and I think of the spirit as something that uses a mortal body for a time, calls it into being, inhabits it, makes itself known by means of it, but its identity seems to me far more imperishable than the body with which it is allied. The body is but the spirit taking material shape, an expression of it, conditioned by it, even weighted by it ; but the tastes, appetites, thoughts, emotions which the body feels are the work of the spirit within—that seems to me incontestable. If I believe anything, I believe that.

And yet I do not know if memory persists. The phenomena of sleep, of illness, of accident, of unconsciousness all seem to me to indicate that the memory is like the cylinder of a phonograph, a record traced on perishable matter ; but the spirit with all its qualities and emotions, its hopes and fears is something beyond mere mortal incidents. If it loves and fears the same things, if it is still laborious, active, pure, sincere, contented, I care very little what its mortal acts and surroundings have been. For consider this. If my friend had been born in a different place and in different surroundings, his whole life would have been a different thing ; his character would have been the same, he would have formed other ties,

he would have loved the same kind of people but not the same people, he would have done the same kind of work but not the same work. It is the body with its limitations which ties us to a particular scene. But who has not heard a man say, "If it had not been for the accident of my coming to a particular place on a particular day, I should never have met my present wife!" And if one thinks of the love affairs which would have developed into happy marriages, but which have been interrupted by some accident, which yet has not ultimately prevented a happy marriage being made, one must believe that the will and mood to love is more important, more characteristic, than the particular tie which is formed. The jealousy of love in the presence of loss tends to draw too close the inevitableness of the particular tie. If it were not for this, then such things as second marriages would be wrong; but a second marriage, however happy and perfect the first may have been, is no treachery to love; the treachery is to limit love, to claim it for one's own, to forbid its blossoming afresh.

I think, then, that the spirit released from the body has fared forth to new experience, casting, perhaps, the very memory of life away with the mouldering limb and brain; but yet, on the other hand, it may be that the spirit remembers, though the silence of the grave seems to me to augur otherwise. But I would rather believe that the spirit rises fresh and strong, freed from the clogging memories of life, its failures and weaknesses, as loving and true and generous as it would wish to be, and eternally the same.

And I believe too that new love and experience and work await it. I cannot for a moment feel that the spirit, however wearied and hurt by life, is condemned to ease and rest. What healthy soul desires sweet luxurious inaction? That is only the desire of the tired and broken body. But what a prospect would it be for a high-spirited, generous, loving, laborious nature to be condemned to an eternal holiday! If our Saviour could say, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," could He mean that all the faithful servants of God would not have their share in that eternal joy of labour?

Work, love, experience—these things, I do not doubt, await the soul set free, in largest and fullest measure. Where then is there room for any sorrow or darkness of grief or regret, if one believes these things?

The sorrow comes from the fact that we remain in the body, have still the burden of life to bear, without the dear and strengthening companionship. And then, too, our utter ignorance of the conditions under which the future life is lived appals us. To compare small things with great, if I am going to pay a visit to an unfamiliar household, the day before I start I am always depressed and nervous. The new conditions, the new relations, the suspension of my accustomed life, the wonder if one will be liked, what one will find to do, the new habits, the new scenes, the new people, all the shadow of shyness, the sense of the little part one will have to play, the mistakes one may make, the new ideas and conventions one will have to encounter, weigh on the mind. It is not a serious depression, and

one knows well from experience that one will be back again in a few days, and will almost certainly have enjoyed it ; but yet one finds oneself wishing that one had not consented to go.

And if this is so in a little matter, how bewildering and appalling to think of passing into conditions of which we know nothing, with all the old occupations gone, all the old ties snapped. Will one find friends, will one be reassured, will one be told where to go and what to do ? One knows the best and worst of life, but in the new life there may be discipline, punishment, loneliness, awe, horror to encounter ; one does not *know*.

And yet it is the universal experience of doctors and nurses that it is easy and natural to die. Men and women die as they fall asleep, gratefully, quietly, contentedly ; that is the normal experience. The sense of sin and failure is apt to trouble the best rather than the worst ; but most souls drift across the bar in serene patience and tranquillity. It is in life that the thought troubles us, as Shakespeare wrote in that terrible cry that rings down the ages :

“Oh, but to die and go we know not where.”

That is the cry of the living active being with all its faculties about it confronted with death, not the utterance of the dying spirit, with life ebbing from the tired frame.

And thus it is not well to brood over death, or to occupy ourselves with anticipation of it. Our concern is with life, and to think much of its end is a sign of flagging energies. Yet sometimes one must face it, as I must to-day.

It is strange to reflect that there is a place in the world, a quiet room, perhaps the very room here in which I contentedly drop asleep night after night, in which I shall come to die, and a place where this body of mine will rest. That is certain and inevitable ; but one should be as incurious about it as one is of the rubbish heap to which the cuttings of one's hair are swept. These cases of which one hears tell in biographies, of men who have their coffins made and set in their rooms, have even rested in them, that is all morbid and hysterical ; that is to set a false value on the mortal incidents of death. It must be simple enough in reality, that one experience through which all men and women that have ever lived have passed or will have to pass ; and a graveyard should make one feel not how sad death is, but how perfectly natural and simple.

And so one falls back into the old train of thought. Faith, experience, hope, imagination, even Revelation itself, tell us nothing of what shall be, except that our spirits shall certainly survive ; and the account of those conditions has varied according to the temper of the men who undertook to tell us more than man may know. The heaven of Socrates, the purgatory of Dante, the hell of the unflinching Calvinist, what poor human guesses they are at the impenetrable enigma ! We must not allow any human imagination to have weight with us. Nothing that the mind of man can dream of the beyond can affect the truth of what does happen ; and when we have passed the veil we shall see that the truth is obvious and plain, and wonder, perhaps, that we ever wondered at all.

I feel then about my old friend that nothing which I can hope or fear or imagine can make any difference to what has happened. He is there, he has gone on his further pilgrimage ; and just as the Father set him here, and kept him here, so He has led him hence, just as He sets me and keeps me and will lead me further when my time comes.

And so one ends by feeling just this, that though we must not rest upon the permanence of life, one must determine to live life as fully and as unaffectedly and as vigorously as one can, looking at it directly and frankly, neither neglecting its emotions nor sinking into sentiment and false pathos and self-pity. That is to put the fears of death above the greatness of life. I have no anxiety about my old friend ; he will move to his new experiences just as sturdily and kindly and simply as he moved through life here ; he will only be freed from whatever hampers us in our mortal condition, not from sorrow or endurance or courage, but from pain and weariness and bodily desires.

XXXIX
A FRIEND'S GRAVE

A.

I WENT a few days ago to see the grave of my best and oldest friend, John Crosse. He and I went to school together, and made one of those perfectly equal and simple alliances, of which one can have but two or three in life. For thirty-five years we lived together, worked together, took holidays together. He had a big and profound mind, entire simplicity, no touch of ambition. I always found that he had gone further than I in everything, and we happened to like the same things.

He died suddenly five years ago. I was very ill at the time and could not go to his funeral; since when, though he has been constantly in my mind, I could not face the thought of visiting his grave.

But I happened to pass within a few miles of the little village where he lies buried the other day, and I went.

It's a forlorn little place, miles away from everything. The country is that low swelling land which is so common in England—great gently sloping fields, belts of wood, streams,

villages ; it has no great charm, but it is homely and quiet.

The village is of irregular grey houses ; it has a curious little stone market-house in the centre of a rustic piazza. The house where Crosse's family lived is an inconspicuous one in the street, but has evidently a big garden behind with cedars. I recognised a few little things which he had described to me ; the far-off river among willows and the big church of Lindon with the clustered houses on the other side. Then I went to the churchyard, rather a bare dull place. I searched among the graves in vain, but at last I appealed to a kindly old man for guidance and he took me to the place. I had been looking for it among the newer graves—but this was dimmed and weather-worn ; even the black colour of the lettering was much washed away. There was the simple record ; a few white flowers grew beside it, and that was all.

Now I find it hard to say that our friendship was not emotional or sentimental at all, though it was hardly what would be called affectionate. It was more what one might call a brotherly relation. We never made any protestations—indeed I don't suppose I ever said an affectionate word to him in my life or he to me. I never called him by his Christian name ; when we were apart we often did not write to each other. But for all that he was a part of my life as very few people on earth have been. He was always there, always ready ; I would have asked him for anything I really needed, and I would have given him anything for which he might have asked me. We spent weeks

and months in each other's company, often silent for long together. We never needed to explain or to apologise or to inquire ; I told him anything and everything that was in my mind, and there was nothing I concealed from him.

So I stood awhile by the grave and knew that the familiar robust form whose face, hands, gestures, movements I could recall with perfect distinctness was lying mouldering beneath. I could not even then give my old comrade the emotional and sentimental thoughts I had never given him in my life. What nonsense he would have thought it ! " This is not you ! " he would have cried. I sent out my mind and heart in search of him, but no answer came back from the depths ; and even as I thought, I could see him quietly smiling at me. It was all simple enough to him ; I felt sure of that. That his spirit was alive somewhere I felt no doubt ; and that he was going about his business as quietly and serenely as he went about it here, delighting in all that was healthy and young and beautiful and finding food for ready mirth in every incident and accident of life. I thought of all our old happy days together, our long walks, our mountain climbs ; but even so with no sense of pathos or sorrow. Then I grew bewildered and asked myself whether I expected to see and meet him again. Life and death seemed all too big and vague for answer ; and yet again I seemed to see him smiling as one who understood and was satisfied. " Oh, never mind, it's all right ! " the familiar phrase in the quick accent with which I had heard him dismiss so many a little casualty, came across me—he

never wasted time on such things ; the current of life ran full and brimming for him, and he was never sick or sorry.

Yet I could not help remembering how, when he died, and I was ill and sad, it seemed to me that his spirit was with me and helped me along. I grew better from that day forward ; and his death, though it was a bitter loss and an aching gap, instead of driving me back into my miseries, seemed in truth to lift me out of them.

And thus it was at his grave. I had gone in fear and heaviness, fearing a sudden jarring of the nerves of sorrow ; and I found there instead some of his buoyant confidence and sweet-tempered serenity. He hated a fuss being made about anything, he hated all solemnity and pose ; and I was ashamed to be anything but natural. Once for an instant it came over me that I would have given anything just to turn and see him coming to me with his strong quick walk, his burly frame, his big expressive face, his smiling eye ; but again I felt his large good-humoured common sense about me and his impatience of all conventional grief or unreasoning sorrow. No, I must not be weak or silly, nor must I waste time ; life was mine to be lived ; he had quitted the life he loved, but he was living still. And so with a smile and a hope rather than with a sigh or a tear I left my old companion lying—the faded husk of him—and went away with his truest message in my heart, that I must take life as it came, not believe it to be dark or threatening, leave the dim and unintelligible things alone, simply live on, suffer if

need be, but not make suffering nor hug grief—that was the dull and craven part.

Yet, so near and familiar is he yet to me, that I should not feel it strange if he met me, spoke to me, explained his long absence, talked again of all the things and people we cared about. The only thing he would blame me for was if he learned that I had missed him, longed to see him, sickened without him. I must be as I always was with him and leave the rest.

XL

IDENTITY

THERE is no proverb which is so much misused and misapplied as the old phrase, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. It is quoted to justify indiscriminate eulogy of the dead, as if it were a positive command to praise and glorify the departed no matter what violence is done to truth and fact. It is actually a merely negative command, and means, "Say nothing about the dead unless you can say something good." It does not even go so far as to mean, "Do not dwell on the faults of the dead," but rather, "If you can truthfully praise the dead, there is no objection to your doing so." It is a kindly and tolerant maxim, not an invitation to indulge in hypocritical panegyric. It really reflects the spirit of the lines :

" There's so much good in the worst of us,
There's so much bad in the best of us,
That it ill becomes any one of us
To find much fault with the rest of us."

Unfortunately for our knowledge of ourselves and others, the pious biographer is too apt to work in the spirit of the misinterpreted proverb ; under his reverent hand the virtues of his victim are toned-up and highly tinted, the wrinkles and

excrescences are smoothed away, the grosser faults and vices disappear, and even the characteristic acidities and absurdities of temperament, the whimsical, hasty, perverse, ridiculous traits of which, thank God, we have most of us an adequate stock—and which after all are the things that give savour, freshness and individuality—these are carefully suppressed and rejected. That is one of the strangest things about the ordinary person's view of death, that it seems to be regarded as a sort of flattening and varnishing process. It is tragic and solemn enough in any case to have the familiar, frail, faulty creature that we know so well suddenly swept out of the world, leaving us with nothing but the perishing clay, while the spirit goes to be confronted with utterly unimaginable experiences. But why this process should be held to remove all sense of humour and to qualify an erring mortal, so to speak, for taking orders—for that is what it often comes to—is a mystery which it is hard to fathom. It seems such a muddled business if we love and dislike people while they are with us for being exactly what they are—for it is the sum-total of people that we love or dislike and not selected items of character—and yet if, when they are gone, we are to love them as being something quite different from what we have known and not to dislike them at all. If we do indeed believe that character is thus changed by death, it may perhaps be reasonable to cease to dislike people, but it is equally unreasonable to continue to love them. I love my friend not in spite of his being unjust, indiscreet, quick-tempered, ludicrous, but because

he is all these things, and something more. If he became suddenly just, discreet, mild and dignified I should probably think he was ill, and I should certainly find him uninteresting. Of course there are certain faults which are apt to make it difficult to regard men with affection—if they are cruel, spiteful, mean, if their sole aim, under all circumstances, like the ungodly in the Psalms, is to suck out no small advantage. But even so, such people contrive to have fond mothers, admiring sisters, adoring wives, and I am heartily glad that it is so. If we are going to forfeit affection in consequence of our faults, the world is no place to live in and the sooner the shutters are put up the better. The only things of which I can thankfully and joyfully believe that death may rid us, are the gross and bodily desires, lusts and greedinesses, to which men yield not deliberately or even willingly, but because the beast that helps to pull the chariot is sometimes too strong to be controlled. But the faults which are the natural outcome of the temperament in action, the strains and stresses so to speak of the tugging and toiling machine, these are not the things from which I desire to be delivered, neither do I desire it for my friends. I do not want to become irritatingly mild, detestably prudent, intolerably wise, for this would be to lose all semblance of humanity.

There was an old country squire of whom I heard the other day, who was deeply and inwardly possessed of pride of descent. It did not make him snobbish or pompous ; it rather made him intensely self-respecting and compassionately in-

dulgent and courteous to the unfortunate persons who did not derive from the Plantagenets. The living was held by an excellent clergyman of very humble origin, who was on the best of terms with the Squire and whom the Squire supported and seconded in all good works ; he subscribed liberally to all his charities, he submitted cheerfully to an elaborate ritual, he praised the Vicar's activity and kindness in all companies. The Squire had an only sister, who kept house for him and shared all his views. She was, if possible, even more proud of her ancestry than the Squire himself—indeed it was almost too sacred a subject to be touched upon at all. She would no more have boasted of it than a priest would boast of inheriting the apostolical succession ; it merely gave her a tremendous sense of responsibility, and a determination to be exquisitely patient and kind to people who were less blest.

She died quite suddenly after a few days' illness, leaving the Squire in deep and abiding grief, quite shattered by the blow. Yet on the evening of her death he wrote an urgent letter to an old friend, a clergyman and a man of ancient descent, to beg him to come and take the funeral. " You will understand my wishes about this," he said. " What would poor Laura feel at having the service read over her, when she was powerless to remonstrate, by our Vicar who, though he is an excellent creature, is after all the son of a man whom it would be a grotesque exaggeration to describe as a farmer?" The letter went on to describe his sense of miserable loneliness and passionate grief. I am sure he had no idea that

his words could be considered humorous or absurd ; he felt himself, and he gauged his sister's feelings rightly in thinking that she would feel it to be a satisfaction to have the last offices of religion performed for her by a man who had reason to be proud of his ancient and honourable descent. And after all, what lay behind the Squire's thought was an intense and zealous belief in personal immortality. He did not believe in his sister's spirit being transfigured and sublimated out of all knowledge. He fully expected to meet her again, and to be able to discuss the familiar topics with her ; and he did not conceive that any experiences or adventures, however celestial or divine, any converse with departed spirits, any waft of angelic melodies would obliterate the fact or the unquestioned satisfaction derivable from the fact that under terrestrial conditions at all events he and his sister were without any doubt descended from the Plantagenets. They were, of course, as the Catechism says, "children of God and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven," but after all, any Christian could be that, while only a very limited number of Christians could be the undisputed representative of Angevin Kings.

But whether we be sprung from princes or paupers, we get little nearer to solving the central riddle, what this little bit of soul-stuff, of vital essence, is that sits within each of us so conscious of itself and its own limits, so sharply and perennially distinct from all other things in heaven and earth. What it is, whence it came, whither it goes are questions which weigh on us but little when the sun is warm on the garden and we sit at ease

caressed by summer scents and delicate air, and think contentedly of all the pleasant things we mean to do. But it is far otherwise when we are solitary and sad, when life stretches before us as a darkening scene, and our only possibility is to endure grimly with such courage as we can muster the trivial duties which have lost their savour ; and worse still if we have made some grievous mistake, flung away some offered opportunity by wilfulness or perversity, and recognise that we have shot away the arrows in our quiver wantonly and light-heartedly. Then we ask ourselves with the sad Psalmist, " Wherefore hast thou made all men for nought ? " and wonder what the stern and silent discipline may be that makes it so easy to miss the way, so hard to regain it. For the saddest part of it all is that we must inevitably blame ourselves, our faltering wills, our stammering consciences for the failure, and yet not know the extent of our fault ; that is the heart of the mystery, that we cannot know whether we can change ourselves or mould our hearts into the pattern which we dimly discern, and sorrowfully desire

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